

A STUDY OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF CHINESE  
RURAL CULTURE

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- I. A Report from the Consultant of "A Study of the Development of Chinese Rural Culture"

# **A Study of the Development of Chinese Rural Culture**

A study of the development of Chinese culture in the rural areas first necessitates an understanding of its historical origins, and the process of its development against such an historical background. Secondly, it will be necessary to investigate the attitudes towards this development, since the establishment of the People's Republic of China, particularly in the last ten years. And thirdly, it is necessary to analyse elements of Chinese politics, economics, and the social environments, and conditions, and their influence on the development of rural culture. Such a study will lead to further conclusions and predictions as to the development of Chinese rural culture, its trends and prospects.

## **Part One      The Historical Background of the Development of Chinese Rural Culture**

China is a country with a long continuous history and rich longstanding culture. Not only does China have the longest feudal agricultural society but also has the poorest peasants and the most backward rural culture. The causes giving rise to such a situation can be attributed, among other reasons, to the history of Chinese politics, economics and societies. Culture in the rural area having taken shape in such historical conditions has, and undoubtedly will, affect the development of present-day and future culture in these rural areas. In *On New Democracy* Chairman Mao Zedong, an expert in the studies of Chinese rural areas and problems concerning the peasants, pointed out: "China's present new politics and new economy have developed out of her old politics and old economy, and her present new culture, too, has developed out of her old culture." The present cultural situation in rural areas clearly reflects the continuation of history and bears the marks of ancient Chinese culture. Therefore to review the history of the Chinese rural area and its culture while investigating the present cultural situation will provide valuable clues and a fundamental basis.

### **1. Rural education**

During the few thousand years of Chinese feudal society the rural area had no special schools to impart the knowledge of science and culture. Village scholars who had studied the *Three-Character Classics*, *The Four Books* and *The*

*Five Classics*\* acted as the only teachers and taught these same books in old-style private schools. Such small town private schools usually had only one teacher who taught individuals or small groups, and whose teaching material and the length of schooling varied. More often rich officials and landlords had a live-in scholar to teach their children and grandchildren or scholars were employed by different clans to teach their children in the clan temple. Only a small number of scholars ran their own private schools. Under feudal rule Chinese peasants had no political say; little or no land; and, after paying rent and taxes to landlords and to the government, hardly any money. Seldom did they have money to send their children to school. *Teacher Zhang Collects Tuition* is a traditional Chinese opera which depicts the story of a poverty-stricken teacher collecting tuition from the equally poor families of his students. Living in extreme poverty Chinese peasants spent all their time and energy working towards their existence and daily necessities. The overwhelming majority had no opportunity to get an education.

The educational system in the feudal society also restricted the peasants' right to education. Students were not only required to memorize Chinese poetry and classics, but also had to write compositions and sit in exams in the classical Chinese style of the stereotyped eight-legged essays.\*\* Upon finishing their education in the village private schools, students proceeded to the county schools where they sat through complicated and strict exams organized by villages, counties and the capital. The peasants had neither money, energy nor time to spend enduring such tasks, nor did they have the interest or talent to do so.

At the same time, the Confucian thought and doctrine contained in the classic texts and writings of the ancestors were passed on and widely instilled in the rural areas by the village scholars, who influenced, in the entirety, the peasants' ideology, customs, rites, and religion. In this way the rural areas became imbued with this feudal philosophy which taught such Confucian moral concepts as cultivating one's moral characters, managing one's household, the relationship between the sovereign and the subordinates, the relationship between father

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\*The *Three-Character Classics* was a book for beginners in ancient China. Three Chinese characters with different tones were grouped together to make recitation easy. *The Four Books* were elementary books the feudal government required would-be officials to study. They included *The Great Learning*, *The Doctrine of the Mean*, *The Analects of Confucius* and *Mencius*. The *Five Classics* are *The Book of Songs*, *The Book of Historical Documents*, *The Book of Rites*, *The Book of Change*, and *The Spring and Autumn Annals*.

\*\*The eight-legged essay was the prescribed form in the imperial competitive examination in feudal China from the 15th to the 19th century. The main body of the essay was made up of the inceptive paragraph, the middle paragraph, the rear paragraph and the concluding paragraph, with each paragraph comprising two parts. The content of the essay must conform to that in *The Four Books*. No elaboration was allowed.

and sons, and one's conduct in society. Such moral and ethical ideas and behavioral norms not only influenced the peasants' consciousness but also influenced his customs, rites and religion. Furthermore, such teachings rendered a large proportion of the Chinese peasants illiterate and for a long time kept their culture backward while impeding ideological awareness and adhering to the old ways. Of course Confucianism also contains some rich and enlightening thought and has fostered admirable characteristics in the Chinese peasants such as a love for tradition, country and land, diligence and a hardworking attitude, frugality, kindness, humility, politeness, friendliness, hospitality etc. etc.

Although Western educational systems came into China after the Opium War of 1840 and following the imperialistic invasion of China; it wasn't until after the May Fourth New Cultural Movement in 1919 that a direct influence is seen on rural education, in the establishment of new style schools. At that time new-style schools were only set up in the cities and rarely seen in the countryside. It was not until the period of the Anti-Japanese War that night schools, in the vernacular, were set up in villages in the liberated areas by the Chinese Communist Party. These new-style primary schools were set up to impart revolutionary theories and scientific and cultural knowledge. In villages under the Kuomintang rule, owing to the reform of the national educational system after the May Fourth Movement, some of the private schools, besides preserving original courses, had new contents added to their curriculum. Such changes, though not obvious then, were important influences to the development of later rural education.

## **2. Science and technology in the rural area**

China, from ancient times, has been an agricultural country; its ancient agricultural civilization was the world's earliest and most developed. To meet the needs of clothing, food, housing and transportation, the Chinese peasants were creators of many technical inventions in weaving, planting, building, vehicles and boats. But with this long continuation of Chinese agricultural society a lack of qualitative change in production methods developed. China's agricultural production techniques had remained at the level of slash-and-burn cultivation for thousands of years. There had been no scientific institutions to study and propagate science and technology in the villages of old China and the knowledge of science and technology was not included in school curriculum. Peasants learned production techniques from the experiences of their ancestors and consulted almanacs to advise them on what farm work was to be done according to what season. The kinds of production knowledge and methods have accumulated through the ages and over thousands of years, and have been accepted and refined into oral proverbs and sayings. At present the Chinese gov-

ernment has enjoined cultural departments to collect, sort out and compile Chinese proverbs into a book entitled *A Collection of Chinese Folk Proverbs*. Agricultural proverbs constitute one of its chapters. The ancient Chinese almanac was called either the 'yellow almanac' or the 'imperial almanac' and is now called the 'lunar almanac' or the 'agricultural almanac' to differentiate from the Gregorian calendar, which Chinese peasants call the 'solar almanac', used throughout the rest of the world. The 'imperial almanac' was most important to the Chinese peasants. It designated the year with the system of the ten Heavenly Stems in combination with the twelve Earthly Branches and divided the year into twenty-four solar terms advising peasants on points of attention in agriculture and helping them to arrange agricultural activities. It also included advice on opportunities, taboos in daily life, weddings, funerals, doing business, going into war and the manoeuvre of troops. Although the latter part was obviously tinted with superstition, all peasants in ancient China, even politicians, militarists, merchants and scholars used to refer to the almanac before they made important decisions. Chinese agricultural proverbs and the almanac basically reflect the technical and scientific level of the ancient Chinese countryside. Though a far cry from the present day level of agricultural science and technology they were nevertheless experiences accumulated by Chinese peasants from their own agricultural activities and under the weather, soil and water conditions existing in China. Up to this day such methods are still widely referred to in the countryside.

### 3. Religion in the rural area

Religion is one of the most important cultural aspects of any country or nation. But China is not a religious country. Buddhism and Islam were introduced in ancient times into China's southwest and northwest borderlands, where national minorities have lived and have become the religion of the local people. Although Christianity was introduced as early as the Tang Dynasty into China, it did not last long. After 1840, the activities of Western missionaries were mostly restricted to the cities. Although around the period of the Anti-Japanese War, churches were built in village towns, the Chinese peasants, owing to the great difference of the two cultures, have never been influenced by this religion. The Han nationality, the majority of the Chinese population, has never had a unified religious belief and religion has little influence in the countryside. Even Taoism, an entirely local religion, has never flourished. This extraordinary phenomenon is due perhaps to the fact that before the three big religions were introduced into China during the Han and the Tang dynasties, Confucianism had been respected by the imperial court with its strict and comprehensive system so much so that people referred to Confucius theories as an 'ism'. Al-

though in the feudal society, temples, lamaseries, and nunneries were built in the villages, the villagers' attitude toward religion was more a material necessity than a spiritual sustenance. Peasants only went into the mountains to burn incense and plead for blessings when trouble and difficulty in life were encountered or when they desired to have sons, live longer, or gain officialdom; while ordinarily they forgot all about the buddhas and gods. 'Don't burn incense regularly, but pray for buddha's blessings in emergencies', this old Chinese saying is an appropriate description of the people's attitude to religions and gods. Of course this does not mean that Chinese peasants had no sense of religion at all. It's only that they made choices according to their own wishes and methods. In Chinese villages, Temples of the God of Earth (Mountain God, Sea God, River God), Goddesses, female immortals and the God of War were more commonly seen than churches and temples of Sakyamuni, Mohammed, Christ or the Taoist Supreme Elder Ruler. To Chinese villagers, the former were more familiar and closer to their practical needs. Pictures of the House God was seen in the homes of villagers, the Door God on their gates, in the central hall was a tablet for 'Heaven, Earth, Emperor, Parents and Teacher'. They paid respects to the Kitchen God in the kitchen, and the idol in their hearts was Marshal Zhao the God of Wealth. But the occasional worship by peasants in these temples was not done according to religious teachings, classic texts or procedures, and therefore are not regarded as religious activities.

The Chinese countryside, while not dominated by religion was dominated by superstition. Although the peasants did not believe in gods, they believed in 'ghosts' for the wretched villagers could not avoid the sufferings of poverty, illness and disaster which they regarded not as the doing of gods but of 'ghosts'. So it is no wonder that there were a larger number of people involved in professions concerning superstition such as sorcerers and sorceresses, geomancers and fortune-tellers than monks and nuns in temples and nunneries.

#### **4. Culture in the rural area**

By rural culture we mean cultural customs, organizations, activities and cultural life in the rural area other than education, science and technology and religion.

If we take as an example a certain household in a certain rural area and look at the cultural activities we will see that there are few and what there is is monotonous, poor and dull. But China is a country with nearly a thousand square kilometres of land and had a population of 500.7 million in old China and over 1,100 million today. Among this 5,000 years old multinational country a lot of culture has been accumulated. The Chinese countryside represents the largest scale and the richest resources in variety of folk culture and cultural

activities in the world. At present the Chinese government has ordered the cultural departments to compile ten large collections of folk art and literature. This collection will make available important materials for the study of rural culture and art, yet only what is considered the 'best' material from various areas will be collected.

Through the ages, the form and method of rural cultural activities in agricultural societies have always revolved around the rhythm of work, the family and the social activities. Naturally, three kinds of cultural activities have existed: work or production activities, family activities, and social activities.

The outstanding characteristics of the cultural life in production is best seen in the work songs and songs sung by farmers, shepherds, woodcutters in the mountains and fishermen. These songs were sung to stave off fatigue or to refresh oneself. A large quantity among them were love songs. There were also songs opposing exploitation and oppression and songs expressing ideals. Dances and acrobatics were also important cultural activities but the more important form was singing. Many well-known folk singers have emerged from these activities.

Rural households in isolated small-scale peasant economics, where peasants seldom left home and their rhythm of life was 'Rising and retiring with the sun', was the home of the cultural life of the family. The cultural activities in the home had many more forms than in labour, such as telling stories, singing operas and songs, embroidery, guessing riddles and playing games. The home was also the place where a lot of Chinese culture was handed down to the young.

Another important feature of cultural activities in the families was the ceremonies which took place at weddings, funerals, building houses, giving births and celebrating birthdays. At such occasions bands and opera groups were invited to play and sing. Careful arrangements were made for choosing an auspicious day, designing and making costumes, hiring bands and operatic groups, choosing songs to sing, meeting and seeing off relatives and friends, and the organization of the ceremonies and preparation of the food at the banquet, etc. All these embodied the custom, rites and art of life in the rural area. These activities differed in scale according to the financial situation of the households. Nevertheless, hosts and guests all followed the tradition or they might be accused of 'You're not a man if you can't pay'. These customs and public opinion had more restraining power on people in rural areas than the law did, where the power of the emperor did not reach. The mark and influence of these customs can be still seen in the villages to this day.

Cultural activities in social life found expression in the celebration of traditional festivals. Festivals in the countryside had the largest scale, attendance, the



richest form and embodied the social spirit and the cream of the entire society. As a multi-national country all nationalities in China had their own festivals while the Spring Festival was the most important festival and was celebrated by most nationalities, men and women, rich or poor throughout the nation. The emperor and officials celebrated with civilians; and even beggars had fun during the three-day holiday. The scale of the Spring Festival was as large as Christmas for example or any of the world's other national festivals. The enthusiastic scenes of the rural festivals have reflected the spiritual and material creation of all the nationalities of China. This was the only time when peasants in old China were able to enjoy rich cultural life; while in this lengthy feudal agricultural society, they lived year in and year out in poverty, hardship, ignorance and backwardness.

## **Part Two     Analysis of the Present Situation of China's Rural Culture**

### **I. The development of rural culture after the establishment of the People's Republic of China**

In 1949, China's rural culture entered into a new historical era with the establishment of New China. The transformation of the political and economical system in the Chinese society brought about a profound transformation in the rural cultural system, the peasants' cultural status, and the quality of culture and cultural life. China is a socialist country and the policy and measures adopted by the Chinese Communist Party and government concerning rural culture bear obvious and important changes in the development of rural culture.

#### **1. Educational revolution in the rural area**

After the establishment of New China, the Chinese peasants went from culturally incompetent to masters of their own culture. They urgently desired to be educated, in order to rid themselves of their ignorance and backwardness. In this way the educational revolution was started in the countryside by the government, the first step was a large-scale literacy movement to teach the peasants to read, aiming at first teaching them commonly used words. Before the period of the May Fourth New Culture Movement in 1919, 'literacy classes for paupers' had already been organized in some cities and towns. The Chinese Communist Party also started new literacy classes in the old liberated areas, par-

ticularly in the Shaanxi-Gansu-Ningxia Border Regions during the period of the Anti-Japanese War. It was only when New China was set up that a literacy movement got underway in villages all over the country. From 1950 to 1951, literacy classes were set up in all villages with a sizable population. Men and women, old and young, went to "winter classes" in slack seasons to learn to read. The peasants' new political status filled their hearts with pride and joy and urged them to acquire cultural knowledge. The need to study the written language arose from the needs of the revolution, for confronted with a new, unfamiliar situation, the peasants had to be able to decipher the information from revolutionary writings and slogans, which were everywhere, as well as government dispatches. Leaders at all levels, who were chosen by their villagers, needed to be educated in order to understand and carry out the commands of their higher ups. The movement of women's rights started when the women were given the right to go to classes with men. There were many moving incidents where sisters-in-laws advised each other to go to classes and husbands and wives attended the same class together. If the drama *Husband and Wife Learning to Read* was only a typical example during the Anti-Japanese War period, it became a common phenomenon in the 50s. The scale of the literacy movement not only marked the drastic change in the cultural status of the Chinese peasants, but also was a positive element in raising the cultural quality of the peasants.

The second thing that was manifested in the educational revolution in the rural area was the abolishing of private schools and the wide establishment of new-style schools.

Although the Chinese peasants had always treasured and had high respect for intellectuals who were very few in the countryside, they felt that the classical language used and taught in private schools was much too difficult. Village leaders and officials, with their country upbringings, on the other hand, instinctively abhorred the private schools. Besides, they felt they could learn the useful common words at the night schools, with less effort. Thus New China never actually propagated a law to abolish private schools, it was the private schools that gradually died out of their own accord.

The local governments at various levels and the then authoritative peasants' associations co-operated to start basic education in houses belonging to the village or in clan temples to teach primary knowledge of science, technology and culture. Besides the school principals, who were assigned by the government or peasants' associations; the rest of the teachers and staff came from among former private-school teachers; clerks from the former government; or troops, whose ideology had been reformed through training. The establishment of the new-style schools marked the end of the old educational system (including examina-

tions, sources of teachers, courses and teaching) in the rural area and the beginning of a new educational system. This was not merely a change in quantity, but more important, in quality. In 1962, the number of primary schools in the countryside reached 650,000 with an enrollment of 58,905,000. As compared with 1949 the increase was enormous. The increase was mostly in the countryside. Owing to the late appearance of new-style primary schools in rural areas and with most of them run by funds pooled by the peasants themselves, the schools lacked in housing, qualified teachers and teaching. Many of the schools have yet to construct new buildings, while some are still in old clan temples, in a dilapidated condition and in need of repair. Without qualified teachers outstanding pupils have to be sent to township schools and to county middle schools. Nevertheless New China has laid the foundation for the development of new science, technology, and culture in the rural area.

## **2. The revolution of rural culture**

After the establishment of New China, all nationalities in China celebrated the Liberation enthusiastically and, in the rural area, a revolutionary movement which the peasants called '*fanshen* (turn over) culture' began. While propagating revolutionary new culture it wiped out at the same time the many influences and manifestations of the feudal culture, prohibiting its spread, and calling on the socialist new culture to occupy the leading position in bringing about a qualitative change in China's rural culture.

The new culture movement in the rural area, besides being a continuation of the May Fourth New Culture Movement, is more importantly a new culture developed in old liberated areas during the period of the Revolutionary War by the Chinese Communist Party and guided by Marxism, Leninism and Mao Zedong Thought. After the establishment of New China, revolutionary culture and other propaganda forms created in the old liberated areas were rapidly disseminated and popularized in villages throughout the country first by cultural groups and propaganda groups of the Chinese People's Liberation Army and then by governmental cultural departments at all levels. The more important forms among them were the *yangge* dance, the waist-drum dance, new opera, ballads, songs, bulletins and wallposters. This propagation of new culture instigated the peasants' enthusiasm in creativity. Many works of art and literature with new contents and form were created by peasants with only a primary schooling, and well-known peasant writers emerged from all over the country. The works may be simple and crude but they had profound influence to the later development of rural culture.

### **3. Cultural Organizations and Activities in the Rural Area**

In the forty years since the establishment of New China, cultural organizations were set up in the villages where there were none and improvements were made to the organizations which already existed.

The cultural organizations set up by the peasants themselves were drama groups, clubs, bands. They also organized large-scale cultural activities like performances in fairs, lantern festivals, temple fairs and other temporary activities.

By dissecting a village drama group we'll be able to understand the conditions, organizational procedure, set up and activities of all cultural organizations in the Chinese countryside and their influence to the cultural life in the rural area.

Chinese rural areas historically had many drama groups growing out of folk songs, balladeering and operas sang in local dialects. The peasants' special interest in drama performance had also boosted the development of village drama groups. Big prosperous clans, at the occasions of building clan temples or watching the Spring Festival dragon lanterns would organize drama groups to perform. They would also organize these groups in slack seasons to boast of the prosperity of their clan. The head of the clan or an elected person decided the amount of donation of each family, the order each family was to entertain the drama teacher, whose children were learning the drama etc. and then hire a folk artist to their drama group bringing his own script. Having few stages in the village, temporary ones were set up for these occasions. All fellow villagers and relatives were invited to the show. Tickets were never sold. Besides the teacher, none of the group members got subsidies except for a meal after the performance. This cultural form has been carried on down through the ages. Bands invited by individual households for the celebration of weddings and funerals were not counted in this category.

Village bands were organized by folk musicians and existed in all villages before Liberation. They received rewards from the family who hired them. The band members had no musical knowledge other than learning from Chinese traditional music scores, following the band leader and a pithy formula for drums and gongs. These bands also could not play new music, and what they did play consisted of some superstitious elements; so most of their activities have been prohibited since Liberation, where only the best players have been absorbed into village drama groups. As these bands had their root in folklore and because their technique in the last ten years has been improving a great deal, many of them have been rehabilitated and are developing. A discussion of this will be continued later.

After the establishment of New China, spare-time village drama groups devel-

oped greatly. The new regime restricted the influence on village drama groups by the feudal patriarchal system, while all former groups and new groups set up after Liberation operated under the guidance of the peasants' association, the village government and the cultural department. Apart from performing in traditional festivals, these groups perform in new festivals like on National Day, the New Year, May Day, the birthday of the Party on July 1, the Army's day on August 1, and other big political occasions. They perform a new repertoire with socialist content as well as good traditional content, most of the stress was laid on the former. Once taken over by the peasants' association or the government these drama groups which had existed on funds from the villagers encountered difficulties financially. So most of them disbanded after 1953.

In 1956, a co-operative economic system was carried out in the rural areas. With this economic backing, village drama groups rapidly resurfaced. Under the guidance of the government, new cultural organizations like libraries, writing groups, art groups, bulletin groups and film slide show groups emerged. Upon the government's suggestion, country clubs were set up which included all these folk organizations in order to spur their development and facilitate their management. According to statistics in 1956, there were 300 thousand such clubs in the country with the majority of them under good management. Their existence and development was owed entirely to the co-operative economic organizations in the rural areas. Reliance on the collective economy had been and will be the main form of cultural development in the countryside. In 1958, these village clubs were renamed cultural stations with singing and performing by spare-time drama groups as their main form.

Other forms of artistic expression included the vagrant artists. They made their living by performing singularly or with one or two assistants in villages. Besides acting as teachers of the drama groups that were mentioned above, most of them sang ballads. A small number of them trained animals or performed martial arts or acrobatics. As Chinese peasants love ballad singing, the ballad singers and actors became the disseminator of Chinese traditional art. Owing to the special role they played, after the establishment of New China, the cultural departments set up a Folk Artists' Association for them, which helped them improve their political consciousness, and their study and production of new songs.

#### **4. Rural Cultural Establishments**

Backward and economically poor before Liberation, Chinese rural areas had practically nothing besides some simple stages. When New China came into being, some well-to-do villages built improvised auditoriums for meetings which could also be used as a theatre or cinema. Most villages still watched films in

open air. In 1956, when clubs were set up in the villages they had a couple of rooms with some musical instruments, costumes, and props. Cultural centres had a few hundred books too, besides broadcasting equipment, blackboards and slide shows for propaganda use. But all these establishments and the equipment they used, were simple and backward.

In 1980, when the family contract system was carried out in the countryside, many of the public property was turned over to individuals and most of the cultural establishments, beside the broadcasting stations, were turned over or put into other use. This was even more common in farming areas. While public establishments diminished, some peasant households began to set up their own establishments. This will also be discussed later. These establishments were smaller and fewer in number than before. It is still a common phenomenon to see backward cultural establishments in the countryside.

## **5. Peasants' Cultural Life**

The peasants' cultural life before New China was established fell into three main categories: watching drama performances, listening to ballad singing and taking part in festival celebrations. Since New China came into being, to enrich rural cultural life and disseminate new socialist culture, the Chinese government enhanced the construction of cultural establishments. Besides drama performances, singing and festival celebrations, the Chinese peasants listened to broadcasts, watched films and TV programmes.

Most festival celebrations, besides the flower festival in the villages of Gansu and Qinghai provinces and the March the Third singing contest in Guangxi, were big fairs in the North and lantern festivals in the South. Another category which was popular in various parts of the country were the celebrations during the building of temples, the birthdays of certain gods and a certain god making its power felt. These were called temple fairs. These activities included dramas, ballads, acrobatics, and performances in the disguise of dragons, lions, colourful boats, clams, shrimps and on stilts.

The above-mentioned forms of country cultural life have been preserved and developed in New China. New items have come into being too, to enrich folk art and the people's cultural life.

The above-mentioned celebrations and singing contests can only be seen during festivals. Ordinarily, in Chinese villages, main cultural activities of the people were drama performance, cinema, listening to broadcasts, watching TV and listening to ballads.

**Drama performance:** In the past peasants could only watch traditional Chinese opera. In New China they are able to see new ones reflecting modern life. To meet the needs of the peasants, professional drama groups have been

set up in every county, their performing quality is a far cry from the above-mentioned spare-time ones. Regretfully, the Chinese peasants, who have been deeply influenced by tradition, did not appreciate drama reflecting modern life. Besides, dramas reflecting rural life which satisfy the interest of the peasants were few; therefore both professional and spare-time drama groups had setbacks in performing new dramas. Modern drama has been more accepted in the economically developed villages of East China where the production has been industrialized. The peasants' life style which has changed with industrialization gradually loosens its grip on tradition and accepts the new dramas.

**Ballad singing:** All nationalities in China have their own ballads which have developed from their local dialect. The large quantity of ballads collected in the *Chinese Folk Singing and Ballads* though they are only the chosen best, is unique in the world. Over thousands of years ballad singers have entertained peasants with their art. But in the last few years, ballad singing has been less popular since the needs of the peasants can be satisfied by the radio. Furthermore fewer and fewer skillful singers, who have joined theatrical troupes, and veteran singers take students. The dissemination and continuation of this art form is meeting difficulty. The number of folk artists has diminished a great deal since the 50s and 60s with only about a hundred thousand left at present. Their existence is limited to places with tea-houses and in border areas where few cultural activities take place and their audience are mostly elderly.

The above forms a general outline of the cultural life of the Chinese peasants. They vary in quality, level and frequently in different areas and nationalities, as affected by tradition and economy. The Chinese government has spent large efforts in propagating new cultural ideas and contents in rural cultural activities. They have made allowances for the customs of Chinese peasants, which are usually traditional in form, yet gradually changing the content and adding new cultural elements guiding the peasants to a higher cultural plane. This is called 'filling old bottles with new wine'. Furthermore, there is still no marketing price for cultural performances in the rural areas. The peasants rely on free services by cultural organizations at the grassroots or on the collective economy. Thus the cultural life of peasants in the better-off places differ a great deal from the worst-off places. In some out-of-the-way places some peasants have never even seen a single performance of one of the above-mentioned items. Besides, in the people's communes before 1980, financial expenditure was overseered by the political body and the cultural organizations, relying on collective economic support, was certain to come under the restriction of the local administrators and had little choices of their own. This was even more so during the ten years of the 'cultural revolution'. Great changes in the peasants'

cultural life have only occurred since 1980 under the policy of reform and opening up to the outside world.

**Cinema:** There was no cinema in Chinese villages in the past, not even in county towns. Films were shown only now or then. In 1951, the film business began in the rural areas. It developed rapidly for films were easy to project and were able to collect funds from a commercial projection and did not rely on government investment. At the present there are 120,739 rural projection teams reaching all villages and towns. Two films are shown each month in 80% of the villages in China and four in more economically developed areas.

**Broadcast and TV:** Although late in its coming, broadcasting developed the fastest, owing to its easy installation and the role it played in politics. In the middle of the 50s, loudspeakers were installed in meeting rooms in a small number of villages. In 1958, the government required wiring up every village, the target was fulfilled except for a few out-of-the-way villages where their population was scattered. At present, 70.6% villages are wired for broadcasting and 41.1% households now have loudspeakers installed. Peasants listened to news, cultural performances and orders, announcement and policies from the local government over the broadcast.

TV was only introduced to the rural area in the last ten years. This will be discussed later.

## **II. Efforts by the Chinese Government in Developing Rural Culture**

The Chinese government has made many efforts during the forty years since the founding of the People's Republic to develop the rural culture.

The fundamental aim of China's socialist construction is to meet people's spiritual and material needs. That is why the Chinese government has laid much emphasis on socialist spiritual civilization while building up a material one. The development of rural culture is an important part in spiritual civilization, and the Chinese government has made a series of principles and policies, which we sum up as the following:

### **1. Guiding principles and policies**

From a study of the documents issued by the government in different periods, the guiding principles are:

Firstly, the whole nation's scientific and cultural quality, especially the ideological, value and scientific level of rural population must be raised, before the backwardness of China can be rooted out, production developed, and a modernized socialist country built. The government has emphasized providing the peasants with a socialist, patriotic, new moral, ambitious and hard working



education.

Secondly, the development of the rural culture is to make the peasants cultural life richer and more pleasant, and to relax and recover after a day's labour. By joining cultural activities of their own accord they can improve their knowledge and skills, and become better acquainted with their own personal worth, in order to stimulate confidence, pride, creativity, and to reach a state of psychological satisfaction. The fact that the peasants are the mainstay of rural cultural activity shows the advantages of socialism.

Thirdly, as China is an ancient multi-national country, its people, and first of all, its peasants have created a splendid folk culture through life and struggle. The rich folk arts of different nationalities have many forms and are characteristic of Oriental art. They are a unique bloom in world's cultural garden. The Chinese government has laid much store on the assortment, arrangement and advocacy of folk art.

Before the first Spring Festival after the founding of the People's Republic, on December 21, 1949, the government instructed the cultural and propaganda work for the festival. This is the first document by the government concerning culture after the founding of the People's Republic, and the document carried an obvious weight in rural areas. It clearly pointed out that the goal of mass cultural activity was ideological education, morality and intolerance of feudal and outdated thinking. For this goal both new and traditional forms should be made use of, and new cultural workers, old folk artists and all cultural groups in rural areas were welcome. The government also instructed that new art and good traditional art works must be provided for the peasants, and pointed out that all activities should not be alien to the principle of economy and hinder production.

As the first document of cultural work, its significance and impact are far-reaching. Though the policies made in the later forty years have been readjusted and modified, the guiding principles have remained the same, a perfect example being the "Advice from the Government for the 1979 Spring Festival Cultural Activities". Its main point still concerned itself with basic rural areas. Socialism and traditional and new forms were emphasized again, as well as personnel and other aspects. The government, in order to promote cultural work, put forward in 1956 "Let a hundred flowers blossom and a hundred schools of thought contend", and the principles of the cultural activity, "after-work, voluntary, small in scale and varied in form". The guideline was also the same as in the other documents.

The Central Committee of the Party issued "Be Concerned with People's Cultural Life" in August, 1981, which is mainly the guiding principle of rural culture, its task and construction. The principle was carried out through the es-

establishment of cultural centres at township level. This document was called 'document No. thirty-one' by rural officials and cultural workers. Guided by the document the focus of rural cultural work began to shift; break-throughs and achievements have been made.

In 1980, according to the changed economical situation and the adjusted policies, some rural cultural centres changed their service for cultural activities from being free to one with a fee, a practice termed 'finance culture with cultural activities'. The practice was supported and acknowledged by the government. Soon the practice spread to cultural administrations and managing bodies. This profitable practice developed the reform and the construction of all cultural groups. The government not only supported in policy, but also gave the practice tax advantages and made a set of rules for its better management. The cultural centres all over the country, according to statistics from the Ministry of Culture, made 223.475 million yuan in 1988, a hundred and fifty percent more than the income in 1978. Out of all centres, fifty-two percent made an income up to seventy percent the amount of financial allocation from the state. The practice supported cultural bodies and rural cultural development. As most of the governments at the township level have no cultural fund, they could provide no more than a little subsidy to cultural centres. Now most of the fund for activities, even workers' pay, come from the income of this practice.

Cultural work should put its focus on the grass-roots rural areas. Guided by this principle governments at all levels have set quotas for professional troupes to tour the countryside and subsidized their trips. They have given preferential terms to the charge for films in rural, and especially in poor areas, and have been concerned with the management of folk artists' performances. All these policies have facilitated rural cultural development and met the peasants' cultural need.

## **2. Cultural work's construction and measures**

Since the founding of the People's Republic the government has undertaken the establishment of rural cultural management, service systems for a wholesome and flourishing development. By taking the rural cultural work into the state's overall plan, the Party put stops to the situation in which rural culture had been neglected and left to its own devices, a situation in all previous feudal dynasties and periods.

A Social Cultural Work Bureau under the Ministry of Culture was established in early 1950s, and later changed its name to Mass Cultural Work Management Bureau. Its divisions were established at the provincial, municipal and regional levels, and its departments at area and county levels. Thus an administrative system from the central government to local ones was established.

These bodies carry out the Party Central Committee's cultural policies, and based on the policies make suitable plans for local development and check subordinate government's cultural work. They go down to basic units for first-hand information on peasants' cultural activities, their suggestions and wants, and resolve problems on the spot. Through meetings and documents, they sum up experience, publicize the merits of outstanding units, correct mistakes and arrange performances, competitions and exhibitions. Their work is to promote a wholesome development.

Cultural management at different levels provides service to the society.

One of the principles the Chinese government has laid is: the state establishes state-owned cultural groups, while the masses take care of their own groups and facilities. In other words, state-sponsored cultural activities are done by the state while the masses' activities are done by masses themselves. The Chinese government has taken state-sponsored cultural activities into each economical developing plan, and through several decades' effort has built up a net of cultural bodies in provincial, area, county and township levels. Those bodies serve peasants by providing direction and service.

**Mass art institutions.** These institutions are under the cultural bureau of the provinces, autonomous regions, municipalities and areas. They advise cultural centres at the county level in their work. The institution began in 1956, increased to ninety-two in 1978 and three hundred and fifty-seven in 1988.

**County cultural centres.** This is the earliest form of cultural body at county level beginning in 1950s. They later subdivided into libraries, film companies, broadcasting stations and museums with the county cultural centre being their parent organizing body.

Its history can be traced back to the mass education stations during the Anti-Japanese War. They were common in either Liberated Areas and the places under K. M. T rule. But their work was limited within the sphere of county and town, seldom if ever, went to the countryside. This organizing body employed only several workers engaged mainly in propaganda work. After the founding of New China it became state-run and the name changed to People's Cultural Centre. Its focus fell on the countryside and the peasants. Beside agitprop, literature and art and popular science were also part of its job. It helped peasants establish cultural centres, theatrical or playwriting groups and propaganda teams in villages in 1950s. As a body sponsored by the government to educate, organize and tutor people in cultural activities, it developed most quickly. Its number increased to two thousand four hundred and thirty in 1952, two thousand seven hundred and forty-eight in 1978 and two thousand nine hundred and fifty-four in 1988 in almost all counties and big townships. Concerning rural areas and basic units it has done a lot of work: in 1988 it

held sixteen thousand exhibitions, nine thousand seminars, fifty-one thousand performances and twenty-one thousand workshops which turned out 0.7 million trainees. It takes the leading role in the three-level system of county, township and village. Many have been quite successful. The fast development of rural culture owes much to these centres.

**Library.** Before the Liberation libraries were backward in China, all the fifty-six libraries in 1949 were in big cities. The government began to establish libraries at the county level in 1956 as a division from county cultural centres. The number of county libraries reached two thousand one hundred and thirty-one in 1988 (among them one thousand seven hundred and twenty-six were under the administration of county governments), with 110 million titles and 100 million in circulation. They held twelve thousand activities for readers, joined by 2.99 million people in 1988. As Chinese people so far do not spend much money on books each year, the state has paid great attention in recent years to the establishment of public libraries, allocating more funds for their construction. As an important place of rural culture libraries have adopted a new look: beside book circulation they help villages to establish bookrooms and in order to publicize science they provide door-to-door service to those engaged in a specific trade. Their contribution should be acknowledged in helping peasants seek a rich life.

**Book distribution.** The access to books in rural areas is Xinhua Bookstore and town co-ops. Books are ordered by county Xinhua Bookstores. Rural areas have been important in book distribution. Since the Liberation county bookstores have been widely established with the service of peasants and rural economy as primary work. They also provide textbooks to rural schools. Meanwhile township co-ops sell books to grass-roots units. With the systematic reform county bookstores, beside selling books themselves, sell to collective and private sellers at reasonable prices. Their distribution has propelled the rural cultural development. In return peasants buying more books promote the distribution.

**Film companies.** Film companies do not produce movies, only show and distribute and maintain equipment. There was no showing team in rural areas before the Liberation. Since 1949, film showing as an important cultural activity has developed fast, the number of showing teams being eighty-four thousand and ninety-eight in 1980, and four thousand theatres either remodeled or newly built, and over ten thousand ticket offices. The number of shows in 1980 was 21.98 million (among them 4.4 million were documentaries and popular science) with the audiences over 1.9 billion. In 1988 there were 120,739 showing teams. Such a boom in film showing has played an unmatched role in publicizing socialist new culture and satisfying peasants' cultural need. As they have a tremendous audience they are called 'chief spiritual food' for peasants.

**Township cultural centres.** This centre is between county centres and village centres.

The first centres during the 1950s were subdivisions of county centres. They were not many and quite experimental. As they lacked facilities, funds and personnel, and the county centre itself had similar difficulties, the Central Government decided in 1956 on the cancellation of township centres. However, they revived in mid-1970s, and their number reached from one thousand five hundred and seventy-three in 1950s to two thousand eight hundred and eighty-six in 1976. They were affiliated to the people's communes' collective economy. As townships at the time had no financial organs and less income, the centres had no guaranteed financial source, even for workers' pay. A boom came after 1981, when the government issued document No. Thirty-One. Their number reached fifty thousand in 1988. Some of them are state-sponsored (five thousand seven hundred in the whole country, and many of them in Jiangsu Province), but most are collective, only subsidized by the state. Those centres, though developed fast, are varied in personnel, funds and facilities due to economical levels and the attention paid by local officials. Some centres are as large as several thousand square metres, have over twenty workers and fairly satisfactory facilities, while some have no guaranteed room and pay, and the workers have little subsidies. However, viewed as a whole, the centres have made big strides compared with the 1970s, and their future is bright.

Many measures taken by the Chinese government to develop rural culture are carried out either by cultural administrative institutions or cultural troupes. The effects of the measures can be seen most obviously in the following:

(1) Publicizing socialist new culture

Local governments, following the experience of the People's Liberation Army, organized many cultural groups not long after the founding of the People's Republic of China. Those groups toured the countryside, and with new songs and plays publicized the Party and Government's policies. As their way was novel in raising peasants' ideological level and patriotism, they were followed by peasant cultural groups with a far-reaching significance. Though those groups were demobilized between 1952 and 1953, professional cultural teams of similar kind appeared at county level in 1960s with similar tasks to publicize new culture. Because their form was flexible and needed less equipment, they soon became very popular. As time goes by their fine tradition has been carried on in different forms, as Ulanmuqi cultural troupes on horseback in Inner Mongolia and "wagon teams" in other areas.

Cultural institutions at different levels, in order to publicize new culture in rural areas, also print materials to give away free or charge very little money.

Those materials teach how to read numbered musical notation, play musical instruments, dance or stage a play. Some of the materials are just song sheets or play scripts. Those materials are printed and distributed especially before Spring Festival. They contribute to the cultural development by popularizing good pieces in various dialects.

## (2) Cultural workers' workshop

Cultural workers in rural areas are either schooled or trained at work. Cultural activists not only learn literary and art skills in village groups, they also improve their ideological and cultural level. Many activists trained by a cultural group have become outstanding workers in production.

In terms of training township cultural centres are very important. Successful centres, either in fairly developed areas or backward ones, always attach importance to personnel training. They hold regular workshops for agricultural technique, popular science or knowledge of literature and art. As their training meets peasants' needs — taking little time and cost (or being free) but producing immediate effect — they are very much welcomed by peasants who are beginning a new trade or cultivating sideline production. Cultural centres at county level train fairly advanced personnel. They may take longer time or require some basic skill of the trainees. Workshops of this kind are varied: from vocalism, musical instruments, guitar playing, social dance or disco to body building, foreign languages and fine arts. As the training is oriented to practical need they are termed 'wall-less schools' or 'second classroom'. And peasants take pride from being trained in them.

Apart from the above-mentioned workshops, cultural teams or groups organized by the centres also train personnel. And the centres are a link between professional cultural workers and the activists among the masses. They give lectures, organize tours, invite well-known writers, artists and experts to lecture or provide face-to-face help. On such an occasion the classroom is always packed to the door, evidence of the people's eager wish to learn.

## (3) Sponsoring performing or art festivals, exhibitions and competitions

Just like scientific experiments propel science, performing and art festivals, exhibitions and competitions promote cultural exchange and development.

The first national folk music and dance festival held in 1953 in Beijing was the first ever in Chinese history devoted to rural culture. It was attended by three hundred and eight folk artists of over ten nationalities, with over one hundred items in sixty-two forms.

Another national folk music, dance and *qiyi* festival was held in 1956 in Beijing, most of attendants being cultural activists from rural areas. A literature

and art festival jointly sponsored by the Ministry of Culture and the State Nationalities Affairs Commission was held in 1964. In 1986 the Ministry of Culture and the Ministry of Radio, Film and Television jointly sponsored a national music and dance competition. Apart from those nation-wide festivals there have been many on the provincial, county and municipal levels. Even in the 1987 and 1989 cultural festivals with a galaxy of talent, rural cultural workers cut a conspicuous figure either in singing, dancing and other forms. Their talent drew social attention and many of them were recruited by professional groups.

The great number of art exhibitions have shown more talented artists from rural areas. Well-known peasant paintings in Jinshan County in Shanghai, Huxian County in Shaanxi, the folk art exhibition and the exhibition of customs and traditions in Gansu were sponsored and financed by governmental cultural administrations. Together with folk music and dance those rural cultural activities have been well acclaimed at home and abroad. By exhibiting in the East and West Europe, North America and Southeast Asia, these folk art forms have advocated the fascinating Chinese traditional arts and enabled Chinese rural culture to walk into the world.

### **III. The New Development and Breakthrough of China's Rural Culture in the Last Ten Years**

The development of China's rural culture in the last ten years is the continuation of the development of the first thirty years after the founding of the People's Republic. But due to the influence of the international situation and internal political situation which is known to all, the rural economy and culture developed at a rather low speed in the first thirty years. During this period there were two big attempts — 'The Big Leap Forward' of 1958 and the 'cultural revolution' which started from 1966 — to make a breakthrough in the development. But both failed.

It is only in the last ten years that China's rural culture has developed most quickly and the peasants' cultural life underwent the biggest changes. The reasons for this development and change are the changed international situation, the economic structural reforms and the development of a commodity economy in the countryside. The principle of reforms and opening up to the outside world and the policy on culture laid down in this relation have provided a direct political guarantee for the development of the rural culture.

#### **1. The cultural quality of the peasants has improved greatly**

The factors that directly reflect the cultural quality of the peasants are their level of education and command of knowledge of science and technology. The

major progress made in the field of education in the rural area in the first thirty years are: (1) the introduction of a new school system; and (2) the fundamentally universal primary school education at the village level. The shortcoming of this period is that the quality of teaching is rather low. Some village primary schools, though lacking the basic conditions, tried to attain a 'high quota' and establish junior middle school classes, which were known as 'primary schools with first year middle school classes attached'. At schools lacking teachers and advanced equipment (in most of the village primary schools, pupils had to take desks and chairs with them when they went to school), village children only intended to learn a few characters and simple mathematics completely free of charge (or a small sundry charge), in order to meet the needs of their daily life; this was the maximum goal. During the ten years of the 'cultural revolution' all schools did away with the entrance examination system, the majority of teachers in the village primary schools, who did not follow the teaching system, did part-time teaching and part-time labour in the fields. So, teaching stopped now and then, and students neglected their studies and quite often cut school and even gave up their schooling.

This situation has basically changed in the last ten years. The development of education has been put in a most important position. The nine-year compulsory education system has been popularized in the rural areas, and education holds first in the investment in the development of social welfare. The contingent of teachers has been strengthened by recruiting new college graduates and greatly improved through in-service training. Students in primary school have increased to 125,357,811 in 1988. The peasants have improved their cultural quality accordingly. However, due to the fairly backward rural economy and weak educational foundation, China's rural education is far behind her urban education if we take the whole situation into consideration. Nearly one-fifth of the country's population are illiterates, the overwhelming majority of which live in the countryside, and there have appeared new illiterates. In the rural areas at the border and remote regions (especially the scarcely populated poor areas), it is extremely difficult for children to go to school because of the lack of transportation and bad weather. However, compared with the first thirty years, the development of rural education has undergone a sharp change in the last ten years in terms of both speed and level.

Another aspect showing the improvement of peasants' cultural quality is that the development of science and technology has helped peasants to raise their level of technological knowledge. After the introduction of the household responsibility system in the entire countryside in 1980, Chinese peasants began voluntarily and anxiously to demand to master more advanced and more practical knowledge of science and technology in order to better manage the land or



cattle they undertook. Thus they broadened the economic base to increase their wealth. It is the agricultural science centres, agricultural technique stations and agricultural technicians that have undertaken the task to spread the knowledge of science and technology in the rural areas. And it was only then that these institutions and personnel became the object of the peasants who often came for help and assistance. Before that, peasants could not increase their income at the time of distribution even if they had learned technical knowledge and skills to get better yield from their land.

However, the place to observe 'The Science and Technology Craze', so called by foreigners, which has arisen from the rural areas in the last ten years, is at the township cultural centres. As the peasants are not satisfied with only tilling the few *mu* of land they have contracted (it is difficult to become rich only by relying on tilling land), they want to seek for and explore new and more ways to make money. The township cultural centres, besides running training classes on agricultural science and technology, also organize many other training classes such as sewing, electrical equipment, repairs on small machines, cultivation of new varieties of vegetables, the raising of poultry and animal husbandry and the making of tools. There have been many science and technology training classes run by cultural centres. According to statistics, there were 11,998 training classes run by township cultural centres in the country in 1988, with 460,000 people attending. Chinese peasants are very practical. They like to learn all the knowledge that is directly related to their interest, the knowledge which is easy to understand and master and which can help them get immediate profit, even if they have to pay the tuition fee and the fee for the transfer of knowledge. They don't pay any attention to the things they are not interested in even if they have value and cost not a cent. Of course, if viewed wholly, the science and technology craze that has appeared in the countryside is still at a low level. It is, however, a phenomenon that has never happened in Chinese history. Today, it is still playing an important and tangible role in the spreading of science and technology in the rural areas, in raising the cultural quality of peasants and in promoting the development of rural economy.

## **2. The change of the development of rural cultural structure and cultural organizations**

The rural cultural structure is closely connected with the structure of the rural economy. After the cooperative transformation of agriculture in the countryside in 1956, cultural organizations became dependent on that of the collective economy, and the policy stipulated that no one was allowed to set up cultural organizations without the permission of the grass-roots government. Individuals were not allowed or restricted to run cultural enterprises or organize

cultural activities. This kind of cultural structure was inevitable and rational at a time when the economic structure of collective ownership prevailed over the countryside. But it had to undergo changes after 1980 when the household responsibility system was introduced. The changes are manifested by the fact that the cultural organizations have been reduced greatly in number although they have remain unchanged in the regions where the collective economy has become fairly developed; in the regions where the collective economy (mainly the exclusive plantation production) has disintegrated, the original cultural organizations have disintegrated or been transferred accordingly. But spontaneous cultural organizations have been restored while cultural organizations run by peasants themselves have also been formed; and well-to-do peasants have begun to run cultural undertakings.

During the ten years of reforms and opening up to the outside world, the Chinese rural economy has developed a kind of township enterprise which is mainly based on industrial production. It includes the enterprises of collective ownership at the township and village levels and a very small number of individual enterprises. This kind of township enterprise is very prosperous in the countryside close to cities and main communication lines, especially in the coastal areas in east and south China. Compared with the original single agricultural economy, it has bigger financial capability to help the development of cultural establishments. Economically, the cultural organizations set up in these areas are still dependent on the collective economy, but they have a much better structure, function, equipment and facilities. In Jiangsu Province for example, many township enterprises have set up sparetime art troupes to perform specially for peasants. However, it is very hard for such kinds of cultural organizations which rely on the assistance of the collective economy to keep going in the areas where only agriculture and stock-raising are maintained. This is because agriculture and stock-raising are managed through the household contract system and the strength of the collective economy has been transferred to households. The management fee drawn from every household is barely enough to subsidize the managing personnel and the teachers of the primary schools run by the local people (this is not guaranteed in many poor areas). There is no money to invest in cultural undertakings. The change in structure of the rural economy caused the disintegration of most of the original cultural organizations of the collective ownership at the village level. Of course, there are some other reasons for this, for example, some of the original cultural organizations did not fulfill the needs of the peasants and their activities were not very interesting.

With the disintegration of some of the original cultural organizations appeared the cultural organizations set up by peasants on their own initiative and the cultural establishments invested in by individuals. Such cultural organ-

izations and cultural undertakings of individual ownership are the outcome of the development of the commodity economy in the rural areas. Examples of this are as follows:

**Township troupes.** This is a half-professional folk troupe formed jointly by actors from several villages, who do farm work in the fields during the busy seasons and gather together to give mobile commercial performances in slack seasons. This kind of troupe is very active in the countryside where traditional local operas are very popular.

**Instrumental orchestras.** This kind of cultural organization which had died out after the founding of the People's Republic has started up again by peasants of their own accord. They offer services mostly for weddings and funerals. In the meantime they also perform for local people free of charge. Although they still use traditional musical instruments, they also have been introduced to Western musical instruments, performing a combination of Chinese and Western styles. A few such orchestras use Western instruments exclusively. The music they play includes both the traditional and the new. Their performances are arranged neither by village nor by township administration, but by themselves.

**Cultural management households.** Also known as "Cultural Specialized Households" or "Cultural Individuals", this is a cultural undertaking invested and run by those peasants who have keen interest in cultural work and who have the ability to manage it. They include libraries, film shows, video tape shows and other forms of recreation. Some of these cultural undertakings have reached a rather considerable scale and need a large investment, so some peasants have formed joint ventures. This form of organization reached a high tide in 1984. Now, there are 242,000 households involved in this in the country, but this figure is far smaller than that in 1984, due to the low cultural consumption capability of the peasants and because some households ran counter to government policies on culture and social morality and were sanctioned. However, cultural management households are still a part of the cultural establishments in the rural area, and are especially needed in the undeveloped regions, where the government and collective cultural undertakings cannot spread. They are still useful to spread culture and cover the cultural needs of local peasants.

**Household cultural centres.** These are set up by those peasant households who are progressive ideologically and morally and richer than average people. They use their money to buy cultural things such as books, newspapers, scientific data, TV sets, chess sets, table tennis and pictures to offer services to their fellow peasants free of charge. Most of the heads of these households are Communist Party members, cadres at the grass-roots levels, retirees as well as rural specialists who want to express their gratitude to their neighbours and the police

of the Party after they have become rich. Though small in number, these household cultural centres play a positive role in improving the general mood of society, and therefore they have won support from the government and praise from local peasants.

**Peasant literary and art societies.** During the ten years of reforms and the opening up to the outside world, with the improvement of their livelihood, peasants have begun to have a zeal for literature and art. Young peasants who have the same interest organize themselves into various small literary and art societies, which they name after Western names such as 'X X Salon'. They write articles and stories not only for publication in newspapers and magazines but also for exchanging feelings among themselves. Among these societies, the majority are on literature, art and music. Within the literary society, the members exchange their writings and select the best to send to cultural centres or editors for comments and criticism. The members of the music societies do the same as the literary society. The art societies are the most influential, have produced the greatest number of talents, and have formed an art genre — peasant painting in the rural area to portray the lyrical rural life. In 1988 the Chinese Ministry of Culture named 45 Chinese Modern Folk-Painting Townships. Besides, peasant photographers have also emerged in the rural areas, but they are small in number and have not formed many societies. Their photos can only be found at exhibitions on the county level. This is because photographic materials are rather expensive in the country.

The above-mentioned cultural organizations have become possible only after the implementation of the policy of reforms and opening up to the outside world and the development of the commodity economy. Their appearance has broken the old setup of running cultural undertakings through the state and the collective economy only. Now a new cultural system and organization structure has emerged in the rural areas, under which cultural undertakings are not only being run mainly by the state, and the collective, but also by individuals in many forms, through many channels and on many layers.

### **3. The change in the peasants' cultural life**

During the last decade the income per peasant has increased from 133.6 yuan in 1978 to 544.9 yuan in 1988. With the increase of their economic income, peasants have improved their cultural level and their capability for cultural consumption accordingly. The most striking phenomenon is the development of television and TV sets entering the houses of peasants. This is unprecedented in Chinese rural history. This modern medium, a breakthrough of time and space limitations to impart information into the houses of peasants, has greatly affected their conceptions of culture and life style. By the end of 1988

the television coverage in China's entire rural area reached 75.4%. But the situation is different in different regions. The biggest problem is the shortage of electricity, and next is the uneven rural economic development, which affects peasants' purchases of TV sets. Take Xiashui Township of Yinxian County in Zhejiang in the east part of China. Among its 1450 households there are 800 TV sets, accounting for nearly 70%. But in the border region in west China there is only one or two TV sets in a village. TV sets are a great temptation to Chinese peasants. Once their housing and food problems are solved, they immediately begin to plan to buy TV sets. So it can be said that the appearance of TV sets in the peasants' households marks a most important change of their cultural life.

The second change of the rural cultural life is the reappearance of traditional folk operas and various performing arts, which have greatly enriched peasants' cultural life. Such kind of folk arts was regarded as 'feudal culture' and restrained ten years ago and was banned as the 'Four Olds' during the 'cultural revolution'. It was only after the reforms and opening up to the outside world that these traditional operas have begun to reappear on the stage. Various traditional performing arts have also been shown during different nationality festivals. These constitute the main content of peasants' cultural activities in the border and remote regions.

With the growing revitalization and prosperity of the traditional folk arts, new cultural elements have been introduced into China's rural cultural life, the most noticeable of which are Western dance and disco music. These Western cultural forms were regarded as having offended public decency and been flighty and were therefore denounced and banned in the countryside in the past, but today they have been gradually accepted by peasants, especially youngsters. However, once this kind of Western culture reached the countryside, the Chinese peasants began to transform it into something else. The 'Northwest Wind' a popular song widely sung both in the urban and rural areas in China is such an example. Some people call the 'Northwest Wind' a new cultural movement. In fact it is only a traditional folk melody and singing style of the ancient Loess Plateau combined with the rhythm of disco music and a popular singing style. As for the disco dance loved by the aged, the young and children, it only maintains the strong melody and rhythm of the original, looking more like the traditional *yangge* folk dance from the countryside in terms of dance movement and tempo. It also has the traces of a primitive sacrificial dance. No matter what appraisal might be made, these new cultural forms have greatly enriched peasants' cultural life.

The third change is that while peasants watched films mostly in the open air in the past, in the last decade they have begun to buy tickets for film shows and performances. Film shows and performances are no longer paid for with

the money from the collective economy. Cultural equipment, especially at the township level, has greatly improved in the rural area in the last ten years. In developed regions, peasants have begun to watch films in cinemas and enjoy operas in theatres by buying tickets themselves. At weddings and other happy events they are not satisfied with only asking an orchestra to play some music, they would rather spend some money on organizing one or two films or videotape shows so as to demonstrate their manners. The rural individual film projection teams rely mainly on this to earn money.

The fourth change is the widened difference between peasants' lives in different regions. This change was brought about by the different speeds in which the economy developed in different areas in the last ten years. Historically there existed an economic and cultural difference between rural regions, but the differences were not very big. In Chinese rural areas dominated by the agricultural economy, peasants might differ in grain ration, housing and clothing, but they led almost the same cultural life: seeing opera, watching film shows and listening to radio broadcasts. But in the ten years of reforms and opening up to the outside world, as township enterprises and trade became the main way for peasants to become rich, those who have fertile land and advanced township enterprises and who are good in making money through trade, have become quite different from those living in poorer regions in terms of both material livelihood and cultural life. Peasants in the most developed regions in east China can have a maximum income of 1,800 yuan per person a year, while those living in the poorest regions in west China make less than 200 yuan per person a year. The peasants in the poor regions, though their livelihood has improved greatly in comparison with ten years ago, have almost nothing to enjoy, except for some cultural activities during important festivals or occasionally watching one or two film shows. While the peasants in east China can go to the theatre and cinema and listen to story-telling in teahouses, play chess and watch TV at home after work or during holidays. There is no difference from city people in terms of cultural life. Differences exist not only between the east, central and west China but also between the different places in the same provinces and even the same county. The only difference lies in degrees.

The fifth change is that traditional culture has gradually slackened in the regions where the economy is most developed. This phenomenon is particularly evident in the countryside in south Jiangsu, but it is not prevailing in other parts of the country. This is because the mode of production has greatly changed in those regions, where peasants only spend about one month of their time on agricultural production and during the rest of their time they engage in industrial production at township enterprises or go out to do trade or service work. The change of the mode of production leads to the change of life style. No longer ac-

customed to the slow tempo and patterns of traditional operas, they have become accustomed to modern song-and-dance dramas and short plays and, in addition to continuing to participate in cultural activities during Spring Festival, they like to organize performances for the new festivals (such as the New Year, National Day and May Day). Traditional performances such as the lion dance, land boat, walking on stilts, clamshell dance and bamboo-horse dance have been replaced by various new performances like the wheel dance, silk dance and waist-drum dance (which has become popular since the founding of the People's Republic). In some villages the dragon lantern which symbolizes the totem of the Chinese nation has disappeared. However, these changes in cultural forms do not mean that the peasants' conception of culture has been completely cut off from the tradition. In recent years 'The Six Pests' have come back to attack the countryside, superstitious activities have revived, and those peasants who have become rich have begun to worship gods on the mountains where temples were removed long ago. The original superstitious believers, though very old now, have begun to do the old trade again together with the newly emerged ones. They have even started to use computers to do fortune-telling. It seems contradictory that these phenomena have appeared, yet they are the reality Chinese peasants are facing today, although they have begun their modern life.

#### **4. An important breakthrough in the construction of township culture in the rural area**

In China's countryside many townships lie between the village and the county town. When peasants want to exchange their own products for daily necessities, they go to the townships rather than the faraway county town. They call this 'going to the fair'. Such a fair is usually held every two or three days, depending on the population density and the economic development of the surrounding villages. Large townships have teahouses which usually invite folk artists to sing ballads for the tea drinkers. Most townships are quite small in size, with only several dozen households, and the fair does not last long, say, one or two hours. Peasants go to the fair early and hurry back home for breakfast. This kind of fair is called 'The Dew Fair'. There was no cultural establishment in these townships in the old society before 1949.

After the founding of the People's Republic, townships developed very slowly under the condition of a product economy in the rural area. The government cultural organs twice set up cultural centres at townships, but the majority of them had no housing or equipment.

With the rapid development of the commodity economy in the ten years of reforms and opening up to the outside world, peasants have had more products

to exchange, and townships have begun to see prosperity. Old townships have been enlarged and new ones have been formed. To meet the demand of the township development and the increasing cultural needs of the peasants, the Chinese government decided in 1981 to strengthen the establishment of township cultural equipment in order to develop the township into the centre of politics, economy and culture. Since then a large-scale cultural construction has commenced, including the establishment of a cultural station, broadcasting stations, film distribution stations, machine repair shops, management stations, libraries, cinemas, TV broadcast relay stations, science centres and sports and various recreation centres. It also includes the expansion of professional personnel and the completion of structural functions. To strengthen the management of these cultural institutions and equipment, many townships have established a 'Cultural Centre Management Committee' after their cultural equipment has been developed on a fairly big scale.

Such cultural centre management committees are not an abstract conception but a substantial organ combining institution, equipment and function. Its function is to organize cultural activities, literary and art creation, sparetime education, propaganda, popularization of science and technology and sports, taking the cultural station as its centre to direct the movement of various cultural institutions.

The construction of township cultural centres has not only completely changed the face of the townships, which had no special cultural equipment for several thousand years; but also had no equipment, no special personnel to take charge and no funds to develop in the past several decades. By the end of 1988, 11,000 township cultural centres and 50,000 township cultural stations had been established in China's rural area. Although this accounts for only 72% in the total amount of the country's townships, it is a breakthrough of great historical significance in the history of rural cultural construction in comparison with the past. The cultural net formed by the county, township and village will have no blank spots anymore. The township is no longer the only place for trade and administration of affairs, but a centre combining politics, economy and culture; it is a 'converter' by which urban and rural culture is mutually absorbed from and into each other, a 'bridge' for peasants to increase their cultural life. During recent years some new cultural forms such as Western dance, disco, brass wind, pop songs and short plays have all spread from the city to the township and then to the village.

## **5. The appearance of the rural cultural market**

Historically, China's rural cultural consumption was not conducted through the form of commodity exchange but that of 'self-performance and self-



enjoyment''. It was almost the same after the establishment of the People's Republic. Although peasants were charged for performances by professional troupes, film shows and newspapers, it was not a complete marketing method but was done by ''command''. For example, when peasants wanted to see a film or an opera, the local cultural administration would arrange according to its plan a film show or a performance for them. It was the collective not the peasants that paid the related fee. The subscriptions to newspapers and periodicals were the same. Almost no peasants would subscribe to newspapers at their own expense. Basically, there was no trace of market culture.

The situation has changed in the ten years of reforms and opening up to the outside world. After the reform of the economic structure, peasants own the most part of what they produce, the collective economy has no longer the power to cover the growing demand of the peasants for culture. With the increase of township cinemas and the setting up of village film projection teams and the restoration of village performing places, peasants in the fairly richer villages have begun to see films and performances by buying tickets at their own expense and paying a fixed price for film shows that they organize on such occasions. The collective is only responsible for subscribing to the few government-run newspapers that they are required to subscribe to, all other newspapers and periodicals are subscribed by peasants themselves. As for attending recreational activities organized by township cultural centres, peasants have to pay for their entrance tickets. In such a situation, the pattern of rural cultural consumption, the peasants' conception on culture and habits have been changing with the development of the commodity economy, the formation of this concept, and the growth and diversification of consumer's demands. A buyer's cultural market has appeared in the rural area.

The appearance of the buyer's cultural market is due to the fact that the government cultural sectors, especially the cultural centres and stations which offered service to peasants, have changed their non-profitable service into a profitable service in such aspects as cultural recreation and the impartation of scientific knowledge and the transfer of technology helping the peasants out of poverty and into a richer life. In this way they get back part of their investment to compensate their expenditure, which is called ''Supporting cultural establishments with the money from the cultural field''. This form of profitable service has aroused the interest of those well-to-do peasants who have mastered a certain kind of technical know-how to follow the example and run cultural undertakings to make some profits. Folk artists, musical instrument players, singers and sparetime actors vie with each other to organize themselves into folk art troupes and orchestras to give profitable performances. In the meantime many villagers have begun to launch profitable undertakings by renting books and

paintings and organizing TV, tape recorder and video programmes. Such cultural services and management are conducted not by government orders but by the equal exchange of commodity, labour service and money in the market.

The appearance of the rural cultural market is an abrupt and profound change which has taken place in the process of rural cultural development. Not only has it changed the primitive distribution form of cultural consumption shaped under the condition of extremely backward productivity, blocked environment and undeveloped commodity production in the past several thousand years, but it has also promoted a lively, powerful, systematic social structure which can coordinate the relationship between the buyer and the seller with a higher transmission efficiency. The information, knowledge and technical know-how acquired by peasants from the cultural market, and their rich cultural life in the last ten years are unprecedented in scale and speed.

However, when viewed from the angle of the whole country, the cultural market is still in the embryonic stage. Though it has emerged in the developed regions, it is far from having emerged on a large scale, or, in other words, it is only the exchange of unstable cultural products. It can only become a large scale cultural market system and mechanism, through the development of the rural commodity economy and the guidance of strong policies on culture.

### Part Three     Restrictions on the Cultural Development                     in Chinese Rural Areas

We probed into the cultural development in Chinese rural areas during the last ten years of the open-door policy and reform, as well as its impact on the rural society in the previous part. The culture, multi-layered and complicated, is mirrored directly and indirectly in cultural activities and psychology, especially so when in a period with a booming commodity economy. If we want to draw a panorama picture of the present situation and its prospects, we will have to make an over-all study, taking all the restrictions into account.

It is a common belief that the culture in the rural areas is determined by rural economy, especially so in the undeveloped areas. However, our survey shows the restrictions on the cultural development are multiple. Contradictions in economy and culture between the past and present which surfaced during the reform have affected the cultural development.

We derived the following from the survey we did in the east, middle and west of China.

## **1. The negative side of a deep rooted traditional culture slows down the modernization and cultural development**

The several-thousand-year old traditional Chinese culture is still exerting tremendous influence on Chinese society, either politically, economically or culturally. The accumulation of two thousand years of feudal society has earmarked the present rural culture, in which the outdated concepts and psychology are obstacles to any social change.

Outdated consciousness is still persistent holding up the economical and cultural changes, such as contentment with the present situation, sticking to old ways of life, the Confucian golden mean and the age-old awe of Heaven and ancestors. We saw in many places that outdated cultural activities had revived during the economical reform, and hopes for an affluent life were laid on super natural beings. A wide practice of fortune-telling, sorcery, temple building, Heaven and ancestor worship and tracing family lines mirrored the negative side of the traditional culture. Conservatism and contentedness has allowed no competition of modern times. Some peasants are callous toward new technology, reluctant to change their way of life, and still believe natural disasters are predestined. Their outdated concepts, rotten values and attitudes toward the patriarchal clan system are inveterate. 'Having baby boys to continue the family line' has put women in check and resulted in a population boom and a male priority. All these add up to the difficulties in education and birth control. In rural areas, the population problem puts strain on the economy, and, unless the situation is changed, science and art can never stride forward. Old illiterates are joined by new ones; the lack of awareness of education produces more school drop-outs; the goal of the nine-year compulsory education is not reached yet. All these will continue to slow down the development in rural areas for twenty, thirty or even more years. The development requires a better quality of people, the spread of knowledge and a higher education level. Therefore we believe our task in rural areas around the turn of the century will still be to advocate the essence in the traditional culture, discard the dross in it, publicize new consciousness, and introduce a modern culture.

## **2. The backward rural economy and imbalance development are another restriction**

There are many standards to measure an economical level and evaluate the way of development. We are facing a grim reality: an age-old backward rural economy and its present imbalance development. The Chinese government has worked hard on this for many years, and the economy has developed as data have shown. However, if we want to study the development in the whole country we will have to face the present economy in rural areas and its restrictions

on the culture in the countryside. We laid much store in our survey on the traditional way of rural production and cultural activities. Examples of backward production can be found in many places. The backwardness has checked the development. And economical development is unbalanced from one area to another, because of the differences in geography, population, education and the introduction of new technology. The situation will probably not change in a short time. Land per capita will not increase, and due to the limited introduction of new technology, the production quantity per *mu* has almost reached the extreme. Big nation-wide change is almost impossible within a short time. In west China, where rainfall is short, economical development is very slow. One example is Weiyuan County in Gansu: a population of 285 thousand, 0.8 million *mu* of farm land (eighty-six percent of which is in mountain areas); an agricultural economy, having no industry yet, one hundred fifty kilograms of grain production per *mu*, two hundred and fifty kilograms for each person and two hundred ninety yuan income per capita a year. Some families are still short of food. Most of the areas in the county have a poor transportation and education level. Their traditional life and production style have impeded any development in economy and culture. From this we believe, among all the restrictions on the overall economic development in rural areas, it is the geography, traditional way of production and life that have the most influence on rural political, economical and cultural structures.

The backward economy and imbalance development have checked the cultural advance in education, the promotion of new technology, introduction of wholesome activities as recreation, and the tapping of traditional folk art. Even in east China, which enjoys a favorable geography, climate and convenient mass media, the economy is still unbalanced from place to place: northern Jiangsu is behind southern Jiangsu and there is a big difference in income per capita both in farming and in enterprises. As terrains are not easy to change, the rural economy based on farming is therefore tied to natural conditions. We believe a social advance in China requires a balanced-developed economy, and the imbalance development at present between the east and west, and the south and north will doubtlessly harm the overall development. Of course in long run the cultural development is promising, but its boom won't come before the economy has been developed to a certain level.

**3. Socialist material and spiritual civilization must be given an equal emphasis.  
Failure in doing so will put another restriction on the cultural development**

A thorough change is going on in rural economy and culture. The ten-year reform has broken the stereotyped production form, and the peasants' enthusiasm has been tapped. Along with the economical reform new culture is being

shaped. During the survey we keenly felt the basic material need of peasants, and the urgency of introducing new technology and more investment to boom the backward rural economy. Compared with the basic material needs, their spiritual needs can be put second. However, the economical and cultural development is co-related, and can either restrict or enhance each other. The two can not be separate, as a cultural boom often forebodes an economical one. Facing a backward economy, policy-makers for rural construction may be anxious to achieve economical development. And some officials might seek immediate achievements on the expense of the future by neglecting the spiritual civilization. Such a practice may harm the co-relationship among the economy, politics and culture in the countryside, and intensify the unbalance. Officials at different levels should give more support to the spiritual civilization, actively promote education, science, broadcasting, TV. and other cultural forms, and set up a long-term plan for a comprehensive and balanced development. Some areas have done quite well in this, laying a sound ideological foundation for a socialist spiritual civilization and a new way of life and production. But in some places where emphasis has been given only to the economical development, the cultural work is far behind, without even a plan or a goal. And in some places cultural work is entirely neglected. These will intensify the unbalance and harm the social stability. Feudal practice may come back to sabotage the political and economical construction.

The underdeveloped culture in a backward economy might appear in various forms. The cultural work might be restricted by the political and cultural quality of the officialdom in charge. We suggest that legislative and administrative measures be taken to boost the cultural development. Meanwhile, to make any measures practical and suitable to the local situation, policy-making should be based on the local environment, the history, the quality of locals and their style of life and production. Any arbitrary or predetermined practice has afforded us too many a lesson. Such a practice will not only be ineffective but will seriously frustrate the people's enthusiasm. Only practical goals and feasible measures will lead to a smooth development. We believe, with scientific guidance, structural improvement at different levels and more qualified personnel, the weak administration of the rural cultural work will be strengthened.

#### **4. Inadequate personnel and their low quality also restrict the development**

During the last forty years a great number of people have worked hard at their posts in developing culture, and some have devoted their whole lives. Because of their devotion the socialist spiritual civilization in countryside has been raised. However, cultural workers in rural areas are still inadequate either in number or in quality, and their living and working environment is poor. Their

ability and enthusiasm still remain to be fully tapped. This should merit attention from the government. The first thing on the list to establish a cultural body is to have enough qualified personnel. However, our survey shows that lack of qualified personnel at grass-roots levels is a serious problem which restricts the development. Schools, especially in poor areas, are in bad need of qualified teachers. School buildings are shabby, facilities few and teachers poorly paid. Without qualified and willing teachers, education in rural places can never be advanced. These problems demand immediate resolution.

Many basic cultural centres have only one person, who has to rush here and there to carry out the work. To engage peasants in various cultural activities is too much a task for one person. The Santai Township in Longxi County of Gansu Province has three thousand and thirty-nine households and a population of 14,249. But its cultural centre has only one female worker, paid 56 yuan a month, who has to cover an area of sixty-four square kilometres. As no cultural centres are established on the village level at present, how can she cover the area alone? And such examples are many. Due to the inadequate personnel much work remains undone. As the situation has resulted in big losses and has gravely checked the development, governments at different levels should give it immediate attention.

Besides, the current personnel administration can not guarantee an employee's qualification. On-work personnel have few opportunities for further study, either for financial reasons or because of no suitable schools to attend.

Being under-paid results in agitated personnel. Those who work at grass-roots levels are exhausted both mentally and physically. The unproportionality between their labour and their pay will dampen their enthusiasm, a problem that must be resolved. Therefore, some administrative measures should be adopted to maintain a salary proportional to their work.

#### **5. Literary and art works not in accordance with the peasants' taste hinder the publicity of socialist culture**

We saw during the survey a wide unsatisfaction among peasants to present literary and art works, either in form or content. Few works have truthfully depicted, on different levels and from different angles, the rural life and the peasants' psychology. Works agreeable to rural history, customs and tastes are few. Movies, TV broadcasts, books and magazines should play a more satisfactory role. This problem concerning the reform of old rural psychology merits tremendous attention.

After a day's work peasants want something agreeable to their tastes and habits. Films, TV broadcasts, and books should be obliged to serve the peasants. Though some efforts have been made in recent years, more are required

from artists, writers and cultural bodies. Their emphasis is still on urban life. In rural areas opera and *qiyi* performances are getting fewer. Urban theatrical troupes, due to financial problems, can not tour rural areas often. As a result, the publicity of new culture has been weakened in content and frequency.

In terms of disseminating information the restriction of the backward economy is more obvious. In-door reception of wired broadcasting is still not popular, and TV sets are not many. Slow construction of broadcasting and relay stations adds up to the difficulty. Moreover, books, magazines and newspapers, as important message carriers, are still not popular. Reasons for this are several: lack of awareness of their significance, narrow access to them and their poor quality. We should never underestimate printed publications, as they often have a guiding role in the publicity of science, sport, hygiene, new culture and modern concepts of life.

The overall cultural development in rural areas is a comprehensive social project. With larger and larger quantities of information, mass media play a key role. Only when the carriers are advanced in technology, quality, quantity and content, will the future cultural development in rural areas be boosted.

## Part Four    Trend and Prospects of the Development                  of Rural Culture at the End of This                  Century and the Beginning of the Next

Chinese rural culture has a long history and its new development in contemporary society has demonstrated great power and vitality. Since the reforms and opening up to the outside world, a complete system has been formed, and a fine foundation for future development laid in the construction of education, science and technology, physical culture, public health, and literature and art in the rural areas. During our on-the-spot investigation in rural areas in east, central and west China, we saw the strong desire of the Chinese peasants for culture and their hope for further development of rural culture.

At the end of this century and the beginning of the next, Chinese politics, economics and culture in the rural areas will go through a critical period. This is because China is still a large agricultural country and peasants make up a large proportion of her total population. The rise in level both materially and spiritually of several hundred million peasants will have a decisive influence on the progress of Chinese society as a whole. The principle part in developing the rural society is the enhancement of the quality of peasants; this is the essential prerequisite for the overall revitalization of the agricultural economy. The spread

of new culture is closely linked with the changes of the peasants' mode of production, life style, social psychology and attitude towards value. The most important aspects of the cultural construction in the next twenty years or longer will entail the speeding up of basic construction of various cultural equipment in the rural areas, striving to consolidate the achievements that have already been made, further raising the level of the peasants' ideology, morality, science and culture and covering their spiritual and cultural needs to the largest extent.

What then are the new features in the future development of rural culture? What trends will the future development have? What are their prospects? These are the questions we have studied in addition to the investigation and study of the history and present situation of the rural culture.

**1. The stability of the political situation, the growth of the economy, the progress of science and technology and the consolidation of government guidance toward the development in the rural area will directly promote the development of rural culture. No big twists and turns will occur. The tendency of steady and gradual development will continue.**

In future development the Chinese government will gradually perfect and consolidate its policy on social reforms and opening up to the outside world and make timely adjustments towards the policy and plan in developing the rural economy. To adhere to the principle of taking agriculture as the basis of the national economy, the Central Government has adopted a series of measures to strengthen the development of the rural economy since the later part of 1989. They have held many national conferences and mobilized all walks of life, through all means, to support the development of agriculture. The fact that the government has paid great attention to rural work has eventually encouraged all sectors of the society to show concern and give support to agriculture. With the steady development of the political situation and the continuous upgrading of socialist modernization, China's rural economy will see a rapid growth in the process of carrying out the eighth and ninth Five-Year Plans if viewed from the Chinese government's strategy in developing social economy and culture at the end of this century and the beginning of the next. It is unlikely that the development of the rural culture will meet with big setbacks.

Through the investigation and study of China's present rural society and the political and economical background of rural cultural development, we have witnessed the achievements made in the countryside during the period of the sixth and seventh Five-Year Plans: The national economy has grown at a stable speed; the material livelihood of both urban and rural people has improved greatly; the old model which ran through the rural economy for several decades has been broken; the technology of agricultural production has improved; the



productive forces in the rural area have been continuously liberated; and a large number of villages and townships which have reached the level of well-to-do people have appeared in all parts of the country. The general increase of the peasants' annual income and the improvement of their material conditions have brought about an encouraging new development to the cultural construction in the rural areas.

We investigated Nanfeng Township in Zhangjiagang City, Jiangsu Province. Of its 44,500 people, 8,000 are engaged in industrial production and 6,000 in farming. In 1989 this township's output of industry and agriculture amounted to 200 million yuan, its revenue to 700,000 yuan. They originally decided to invest 1% (7,000 yuan) of their revenue in running cultural undertakings in their local place but at the year's end their expenditure in this regard was far more than that. They have built a cultural palace of 1,100 square metres, a cinema with 1,200 seats, set up a library and a sparetime art troupe performing especially for peasants. There is a complete middle school, three junior middle schools, one key primary school and twelve village schools, with a total of 5,800 students and 382 teachers. However, this township is not the typical example of the richest rural areas. In China's rural areas there have appeared quite a number of fairly rich and culturally prosperous townships, where peasants have reached a rather high level in terms of both material and cultural life. From this we can see that the growth of the rural economy will inevitably give rise to the development of rural culture. This is beyond any doubt. It is our belief that with the deepening of the economic reforms in the rural area, peasants' initiative will be further brought into play, the road of all walks of life supporting agriculture will become broader and broader, and the rural social economy will develop continuously. Of course, as there exist big differences at different regions in the countryside, the speed of economic development will be subject to the limitations of objective conditions, and therefore the cultural development will be steady and gradual.

By being steady and gradual we mean that the culture in different rural regions will develop normally and harmoniously in step with the progress of the politics and economy of those regions. There will be no big twists and turns. In the meantime, there will be continuity provided that it is given scientific and rational guidance of policy and the efforts of rural cultural workers. Any thinking of a big leap or an explosive development will be groundless and illusive. For this is determined by the law of the development of Chinese social history and rural society.

**2. The imbalance in cultural development will still exist in different regions but the difference between the city and countryside will be reduced.**

China's vast area, uneven distribution of population, especially her different

geographic conditions and mode of production will affect the development of the rural economy. In the meantime the development of rural culture will be influenced by cultural history, customs and information. Therefore the imbalance in cultural development will exist for a long period, but this difference between the city and countryside and between regions will gradually be reduced; it will not expand.

During our investigation in Sanyuan County in Shaanxi Province in west China, we found a township with a prosperous economy and culture. It is called Dacheng Township. It has 17 administrative villages, 6,700 households with a population of 25,806. Its total output of industry and agriculture was 68,330,000 yuan in 1988, with each person having a gross income of over 2,000 yuan and a net income of 587 yuan. It has 9 township-run enterprises, 16 village-run enterprises, 2 middle schools, 12 primary schools, 3,574 students, the rate of school children accounting for 99.7%. It has 1,065 broadcasting loudspeakers, 1,700 TV sets which can receive channels on four frequencies. Its cultural centres occupy an area of over ten *mu* with a large space for cultural activities. There is a peasant cultural and technical school, a library, a film projection team and two video-tape projection teams, which are often organizing cultural activities. In 1989 alone, they held 16 technical training classes (including chicken, pig and cattle raising and wheat plantation) and trained 967 people. Thanks to the publicity of technical know-how, Dacheng Township is now raising a total of 210,000 chickens. This township's cultural centres have done a wonderful job.

In Meili Township in Changshu City in Jiangsu Province in east China, we find the peasants there have embarked on the road of modern development. This township has a population of 34,800, 20 administrative villages, 27,000 *mu* of cultivated land, 40 township-run enterprises and 90 village-run enterprises. Its output of industry, agriculture and commerce reached 230 million yuan, with an income of 1,123 yuan per person in 1989. Their cultural centres (including peasants' palace) occupy an area of 72 *mu*, with a cultural investment of 2,000,000 yuan. They have established various cultural stations for people of different ages and different categories, often organizing all kinds of cultural activities. Through hard labour, the peasants there have greatly improved their material and cultural life to a fairly high level. They have set up a bright example for the construction of rural cultural modernization, though such advanced townships are not very many in the country.

If we make a comparison between Dacheng Township in west China and Meili Township in east China, two places set a thousand miles apart, we can make these conclusions: (1) peasants' material and cultural life improves with

the reforms of economic structure and the vigorous development of township enterprise no matter whether it is in the coastal regions, in the east, or the plateau in the west; (2) differences exist between them; (3) the peasants' cultural life of these regions is close to the level of the cultural life of city people. So we believe that the development of China's rural culture will be unbalanced, but this imbalance is one that has appeared in the process of development, and the difference between regions and between the city and countryside will gradually reduce.

3. While continuing to pay attention to the construction of township cultural centres, the development of cultural undertakings will be centred on gradually consolidating the construction of village cultural organizations on the basis of the development of economy, in order to form and perfect the cultural net of the county, township and village.

The implication of continuously strengthening township cultural centres has begun to surpass the scope of the present 'small culture'. By the cultural centre we today mean a combination of rural literature and art, sports, public health, science and technology, basic education and political propaganda. It has become a multi-purpose, comprehensive cultural institution. Not only is it a demonstration base for literary and art troupes to help peasants to develop artistic and recreation activities, but it is also a place to exchange information, promote the application of modern science and technology, develop intelligence, train new-type personnel and have social associations. By strengthening the township cultural centre, peasants' needs for material and spiritual culture can be satisfied, cultural investment and construction can be comparatively concentrated and get better social results. The functions of the township cultural centre can vary according to the specific conditions in the mountain areas, pastoral and scarcely-populated regions in west China. Especially in the regions inhabited by minority nationalities, the function of the township cultural centre will show through new forms of organization and activities. In the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Regions and Gansu Province there have appeared in recent years mobile cultural service vehicles and pasture art troupes. They combine artistic guidance with art performance, distribution of books with book lending, commercial services with daily life services. This kind of cultural form has been warmly welcomed by local peasants and herdsmen and opened up a new path for the cultural development in the scarcely-populated regions.

The village is the basic unit of the society. It is of vital importance to spread culture at the village level. It is our belief that when the development of township cultural centres reaches a certain scale, cultural organizations of the village will be established and have direct connections with peasants' economic

and cultural life. They will first appear in the villages with better economic and cultural conditions, and they will not be in the same model. Each village will display its own advantage. Mass folk cultural activities, promoted by village cultural organizations, will develop through various forms and play an important role in enhancing the spirit of national culture and developing folk art and rural culture.

In a word, the forming and perfection of the cultural net of the county, township and village will bring a new look to the development of rural culture.

#### **4. The multi-system, multi-channel and multi-layer method will be the main form in developing rural culture in the future.**

After China's rural politics, economy and culture undergo the period of reforms and adjustment, the economic structure of the rural society will have a new pattern in keeping with the development of economy as a whole. Various cultural organizations and activities with extensive features will inevitably emerge from all walks of life, and they will coordinate, complement and help each other in the course of development and eventually converge into the whole social culture. They will mobilize the initiative of various political, economical and cultural institutions of the township and village to run their own culture on their own strengths, so as to further explore the potentialities of Chinese national and folk culture. With the appearance of various rural cultural organizations, the active participation of young people's cultural establishments, the full development of school culture and the forming of different kinds of rural cultural organizations such as physical culture, science and technological culture, folk arts and folk literature, a prosperous rural culture will appear in China's countryside, and a hundred flowers will blossom.

What is more noticeable is that enterprises will lend a grand influence on rural economic life in the future. Peasants will leave their land but not their homes when they work in the enterprises producing commodities for social exchange. This is the eventual outcome of the reforms of the rural economic structure. The enterprise culture derived from it will play a mainstay role in the construction of rural culture by taking advantage of the continuously growing economy and organization. In the meantime, rural school culture will take advantage of its concentrated personnel and high quality of culture and play an exemplary role in the comprehensive development of rural culture. With the introduction of new cultural concepts, school teachers and students will continuously raise their cultural level, and in their turn, the students will impart knowledge to every household to enliven the cultural atmosphere of every family. So long as there is a guarantee of economical life, peasants will have a stronger desire for culture and combine family culture and social culture together to form a multi-

layer, rich system of cultural exchange in the countryside.

In short, with the forming of a multi-layer cultural pattern, the construction of cultural centres invested and run by the state, the consolidation of various cultural institutions and organizations sponsored by the collective and mass organs, and the powerful supplementation by cultural household and individuals, the big multi-structure and multi-function cultural system will be strengthened continuously and lay a foundation for the development of Chinese modern rural culture, so that the image of Chinese rural culture will be completely established to stand amongst the modern cultures of both China and the world.

**5. The progress of science and technology will bring modern transmission means and techniques into the rural area to speed up the spread, exchange and assimilation of new culture.**

The world's new technological revolution has greatly promoted the progress of human society. China's social reforms and opening up to the outside world, the invigoration of her economy and the progress of her culture all have greatly benefitted from the revolution of science and technology. The appearance and import of technological products in large numbers will undoubtedly affect the various sectors of Chinese culture, and the concepts of rural culture, the cultural system and construction will undergo a profound change.

The wide use of computers will bring the hope that rural economic production can develop at high speed, and the introduction of an advanced form of media will be a powerful motive force to rural culture. The publicity of audio-visual education programmes in the rural areas, the application of modern visual equipment and the forming of new concepts and literary forms in culture and art will increase the peasants' demands for culture.

At the same time, the modernization of China's rural culture will depend on the increase of the peasants' level of material and cultural consumption. But if we view the present cultural situation in the developed and fairly developed areas, the prospects are very bright. Many villages and townships have been equipped with complete sets of advanced cultural facilities, much modern visual equipment has appeared in schools and cultural centres and stations. Peasants have begun to understand and accept the new transmission media and have increased their level of using them in terms of both quantity and quality. Tape recorders, TV sets and video tape recorders have entered the peasants' households and have increased in number every year. In addition, peasants are increasing their interest in cultural information through the form of books, so rural libraries will also develop very quickly.

The publicity of modern cultural transmission media is pounding on the peasants' old, backward, conservative ideas. Rural culture will become an important

means to develop intelligence. With the broadening of peasants' vision, their mode of production and life style will change accordingly, the spiritual civilization of the entire rural area will quicken its pace. Therefore, we have every reason to say that the foundation for the development and modernization of China's rural culture is hopeful.

**6. With the increase of the peasants' economic income, their cultural consumption ability and level will increase, and their cultural life will become diversified, which will promote the forming and expansion of a rural cultural market.**

The further development of the rural economy demands a spontaneous development of the rural culture, education and science and technology. As peasants gradually become rich, increase their income and raise the level of their material life, they will raise the level of their cultural consumption and strengthen its capabilities. Then the proportion of their material life and spiritual cultural consumption will change gradually. To perfect themselves and satisfy their needs for spiritual culture, they will have a strong desire for knowledge, pleasure and beauty, and their desire will be gradually strengthened with the growth of the economy and their own individual quality. We saw this kind of desire during our investigation in Jiangsu Province in east China.

Wuxi County of Jiangsu Province, located in the golden area in the Yangtse River Delta, is the first county of the whole country to become rich. Its output of industry, agriculture and commerce increased from 1.432 billion yuan in 1980 to 8 billion yuan in 1989, its revenue being 404 million yuan. The county's grand total of investment in the township cultural construction exceeds 50 million yuan in five years. Their development from simple cultural facilities in the past to modern equipment has greatly enriched the rural culture. The peasants' cultural consumption has increased every year, cultural equipment and the content of cultural life have improved, and their conception of cultural consumption and its capabilities have undergone a historical change. Due to the lack of schooling, peasants of the older generation have a very low interest in cultural activities and are satisfied with playing chess, story-telling and local opera, but young peasants have a higher demand for cultural activities and wider interest. In addition to science and technological knowledge, they enjoy film, opera, dance, sports, literature, music, arts and scientific research. Cultural activities have become an indispensable part of their life.

The rise in the level of the peasants' cultural consumption and their varied demands for artistic products and cultural services will play an active role in the forming of the rural cultural market. In recent years there has appeared a tendency in the development of the rural cultural market. We believe that the development of this market will promote the appearance of new cultural varie-

ties. Peasants will have a better understanding of the new cultural media transmission and technology, strengthen the concept of cultural consumption and increase the scale of production and consumption of cultural products in the countryside. In the meantime the ability to increase cultural production will develop with the market. Thus, with the development of the socialist commodity economy and the changes in the peasants' psychology, conception and ability toward cultural consumption, it is inevitable that the rural cultural market will rise and develop.

**7. With the increase in the quality of the peasants and the consolidation of their knowledge in dealing with the social politics, economy and cultural life, they will gradually regain the initiative in participating in rural cultural activities and become the real masters of rural culture. The participation by women will be the important mark of the progress of rural culture.**

Peasants make up the overwhelming majority of China's population. The level of their political consciousness, economic position and cultural quality marks the degrees of development of Chinese culture. A society without peasants to take part in its politics, economy and culture is an incomplete society. With the overall invigoration of rural economy and the increase in economic position, Chinese peasants have become more active in social and cultural activities. Only when the broad masses of peasants are totally involved in social culture, will their personality and mental world become complete. The expansion of social exchange and the assimilation of world culture will turn Chinese peasants into modern peasants and real masters of culture.

In the development of rural culture at the end of this century and the beginning of the next, peasants will actively take part in basic education, professional technical education, the popularization of science and technology, social aesthetics and cultural recreation activities. In the process of development, peasants' various cultural institutions will coordinate with their cultural organizations and forms, the government will give rational guidance, but the peasants will select for themselves in order to perfect themselves — all this will form a social, scientific and democratic integral whole of Chinese rural culture.

Women's participation in the social, economic and cultural revolution is also an important symbol to mark social progress. The progress of Chinese rural society is marked by how many women participate in it. Due to the influence of the traditional culture in the past several thousand years, Chinese women, especially the women in the countryside, lack a solid social base in terms of political, economical and cultural conditions and position, the social and cultural psychology, their own female psychology, and cultural conception ability. Only through a multiple, comprehensive social revolution, will it be possi-

ble for all women to take part in various activities on their own initiative.

The political position of Chinese women has changed profoundly in the past forty years after the founding of the People's Republic. In the early 1950s they began to demonstrate their ability in social and cultural activities. Their participation in theatrical performances was pivotal in breaking down the yoke of feudal forces. Later they took part in all social activities. In recent years they have participated in all large cultural activities such as *yangge* dances, waist-drum dances, song competitions, opera performance, popular-song singing, social dances and disco dances. With the progress of the times, rural women in the areas inhabited by the minority nationalities have also emancipated themselves from the land and housework and plunged into the tide of economic reforms. In Guanghe County, Gansu Province (a county where the Hui nationality occupy 97.4% of its population), the women there have begun to free themselves from the yoke of feudalism and old religious customs and actively take part in commercial activities. Women's role in the rural society has displayed various kinds of activities such as the creation of literature and art, the elimination of illiteracy, the learning of production skills and trade. Whether in the fairly poor northwestern region or in the developed eastern region, rural women's role has already been recognized by the society. It is therefore our belief that more and more rural women will show concern for and participate in the construction of rural culture, and the speed of increase will be very high.

**8. The best folk, traditional culture of the national minorities will continuously develop, foreign culture will be first assimilated and filtered in the city and then introduced widely into the rural area, and the folk culture and arts of the nationalities will further prosper and spread out from the rural areas towards the whole world to join in the international cultural exchange.**

China is country with many nationalities, and each of her 56 nationalities has its own rich and colourful culture and art. The rich folk culture and colourful folk art of these nationalities have already spread widely throughout the country. The development of the rural culture of today and the future includes the renaissance of the national folk culture which has taken roots in the countryside, and the invigoration of the best of national folk culture which includes traditional virtue, folklore and folk arts.

The rural area is the place where the traditional culture arose and developed. In developing rural culture in the future, it is very important to actively excavate the heritage of traditional culture, and develop and recreate a new variety of national folk culture. It is an important part of the comprehensive development of rural culture. In the meantime, the continuous introduction of foreign culture will influence the coherent conception on the rural traditional culture



and cultural transmission techniques and content. New culture, after being filtered and absorbed in the city, will be constantly imparted into the countryside to give new factors to the creation of rural culture.

The ten years of reforms and opening up to the outside world have seen an all-round invigoration of folk culture and art of the various nationalities. The cultural and art resources of the nationalities in different regions have been explored. They have taken on various elements of the culture of other nationalities and foreign cultures and formed a new artistic style welcomed by both peasants and city people. Besides, with their distinctive features, the traditional folk arts enjoy great prestige both at home and abroad. The cultural exchange between different regions and countries has brought Chinese folk culture and art out of the rural area to all parts of China and the world. In the last ten years many folk art troupes from various provinces and autonomous regions went on performance tours in West Europe, Northern America and Southeast Asia. It has proved that the folk culture of the various nationalities will have great potentialities for the development at the end of this century and at the beginning of the next.

China's rural culture has experienced a long history. Today, as a fine culture, it has once again called forth its vigour. In the process of social development in the future, it will add a new chapter to the history of Chinese culture as a whole.

**March 1990, Beijing**

## A Report from the Consultant of ‘‘A Study of the Development of Chinese Rural Culture’’

Based on an agreement with UNESCO, we have completed the project of ‘‘A Investigation on the Development of Chinese Rural Culture’’. Attaching great importance to the investigation, the Ministry of Culture of the People’s Republic of China organized a group of specialists to carry out the task in December of 1989. It included Gao Wansheng, vice-director of Mass Culture Office of Ministry of Culture, Professor Yang Fensheng, council member of China Mass Culture Society, Associate Professor Wang Deguan, council member of the same society and Cheng Jianmin, also a member of the society and director of the Research Department of Huanggang Mass Culture Hall in Hubei Province.

It took 110 days for the four-member team to do the investigation and draft the report. They spent 60 days sampling and travelled more than 10,000 kilometres, covering Gansu and Shaanxi provinces in west China, Jiangsu and Zhejiang provinces along the eastern coast, Hubei Province in the centre and Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region in the south. Wherever they went, they listened to the detailed introduction provided by the local officials in charge of cultural affairs, talked with university professors and experts of research institutes and, particularly, travelled to the countryside and interviewed peasants in their homes. They investigated 15 counties of various regions, more than 20 townships and 30 villages. It was in the winter that they started their survey. Braving the cold and fatigue, the team trekked across the icy Loess Plateau to get a true picture of the peasants’ cultural life. Likewise their first-hand materials on China’s rural politics, economics and culture accumulated amply.

Based on their investigations and research work, they finally finished drafting the report after making a number of major alterations and revisions under the guidance of officials and experts from the Ministry of Culture.

The report consists of four parts. The first part portrays the historical background of the development of China’s rural culture. A country of 1.1 billion people, China has a long cultural tradition, which has profoundly influenced the Chinese peasants. The second part describes the efforts that have been taken in the past 40 years since the People’s Republic was founded to develop its rural culture, especially the profound changes that have taken place in the past ten years of reform and opening to the outside world. There were both successful policies as well as mistakes and setbacks in the process of development. The Chinese government has, generally, attached great importance to the peasants’

cultural life; rarely is there a central government that issues directives to promote rural culture like the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party has done. The third part analyzes the difficulties and hindrances confronting further development of rural culture; and the last part foresees the trends and prospects of rural cultural development at the end of this century and the beginning of the next.

The report, as we find it, distinguishes itself in these aspects: firstly, it is factual and accurate. Analysis and conclusions are based on ample first-hand materials; its content is rich and scientific. Secondly, it is objective and down-to-earth. It solidly follows the actual development of the subject to seek its historical background and predict its prospect. Thirdly and most importantly, the surveyors are all experienced and learned specialists who have done rural culture research work for years and have published many works in the field. Therefore, the report glints with their incisiveness.

We think the report is an invaluable document and hope it will arouse due attention from UNESCO.

We look forward to further co-operation.

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**March 15, 1990**  
**Beijing**