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THE EXPERIENCE OF ASIA AND THE PACIFIC REGION

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Rationally Exploring the Treasures of Traditional Culture:
Report on China's Economic Exploitation of Folklore

China is a multi-nationality country with 56 nationalities, among whom customs and cultures differ. The folk culture as the main body of each ethnic culture is generally known as the ethnic and folk culture. The most basic and common form of the ethnic and folk culture is the folklore.

Folklore is a kind of culture based on tradition. It is born in the daily life of the broad masses of people and is produced as a result of their daily needs. It imitates and depicts their daily life and reflects the values and aesthetic demands of the common people in a ethnic group, a region or even a village. It originates from daily life, also changes as the latter does, and vanishes to some extent with the disappearance of some forms of daily life. With the passage of time, folklore gradually forms and becomes folklore tradition, present in the national languages, works of folk literature, folk music and dance, fairy tales and legends, properties and customs, folk arts and crafts, architecture and decorations of civilian houses, even national costumes and personal adornments and local delicacies and cuisine. For an ethnic group, folklore is its identity; for a country, it is the root of the national cultural tradition, national traits as well as national civilization; for all mankind, it is the rich and varied but non-regenerative resources as well as the incomparably valuable heritage of human society. How to properly preserve and exploit the resources of folklore has indeed become an important and extremely urgent issue confronting all mankind.

I

The Chinese Government attaches great importance to the protection and utilization of cultural heritage. Our country's first cultural law, The Law of the People's Republic of China on the Protection of Cultural Relics promulgated in 1982, is a special law governing historical and cultural heritage, symbolizing that the protection of cultural heritage has got onto the right track of legality. The Law on the Protection of Cultural Relics has provided some tangible expressions of an important and historical value, such as folklore architecture and folk arts and crafts, with direct and powerful legal protection.

Our general and specific policies on the protection of cultural relics are the norms and standards to correctly handle the relationship between the preservation and protection of cultural heritage on one side and their exploitation and utilization on the other. These policies are also of equal importance regarding the protection of folklore with intangible cultural heritage as the dominant factor. As to these policies, the following three points are the most important:

(A) The government shall act as the main body in the preservation work while the general public shall be encouraged to share the responsibility. This principle defines the main responsibility and leading position of the government in the protection of cultural relics.

(B) "Using the protection as priority while putting the rescue work on top of the list" is the guiding principle. This principle clearly defines the management of cultural relics with protection as the core and at the same time the rescue work of cultural heritage as the most

pressing task. So far as intangible cultural heritage are concerned, the idea of "putting the rescue work on top of the list" is of more important significance, because with the socio-economic changes, intangible cultural heritage, if not rescued in time, will die out much faster than tangible ones.

(C) It is the idea of "effective protection with reasonable use". It is also of the utmost importance to handle well the relationship between protection and utilization regarding the preservation of intangible cultural heritage. Utilization on the basis of protection may, in a sense, result in more effective protection. It has been proved to be an effective method of preservation by making use of cultural heritage to engage in educational training and develop artistic and scientific research. Since our country entered a new stage of carrying out the reform and open policy in the 1980s, the commercial exploitation and use of traditional folklore and ethnic and folk art has in varying degrees brought funds, been a driving force and brought about successors, so far as the preservation of intangible cultural heritage is concerned. This commercial exploitation and utilization are first made in the exploitation of traditional skills and works of arts and crafts and then in the restoration of various national traditional activities, such as temple fairs, flower fairs, etc. as well as the construction of many models of "ethnic culture (folklore) villages". Of course, mishandling of exploitation and utilization will also cause destruction. This is exactly what we need to avoid by correctly handling the relationship between protection and utilization.

China's well-known painter and educator of fine arts Liu Haisu once said, "Lack of transport facilities and much difference in languages are unfavorable factors of cultural exchanges. They may perhaps become favorable factors in the preservation of ancient traditions and formation of special artistic qualities." The development at top speed of modern economy and expansion of social contacts have to a certain degree destroyed the foundation of existence of traditional culture, so the rescue of cultural heritage has become an urgent task that brooks no delay. In this respect, China should make and has already made great contributions to humanity. Here, I would like to avail myself of this opportunity to brief you on a giant project by China to protect traditional culture, namely The Ten Collections of the Chinese National Folk Literature and Arts. The ten collections include: Collection of Chinese Folk Songs, Collection of Traditional Chinese Operas' Music, Collection of Chinese National and Folk Instrumental Music, Collection of the Chinese Quyi Music, Collection of Traditional Chinese Operas, Collection of Chinese Folk Dance, Collection of Chinese Folk Tales, Collection of Chinese Ballads, Collection of Chinese Proverbs and Annals of Chinese Quyi. The Ten Collections are made up of volumes for each of the Provinces. Each Province, Autonomous Region or Municipality directly under the central government has 10 volumes and altogether 300 volumes (no Taiwan volumes for the time being). Some of these volumes comprise two books (book 1 and book 2). So altogether there will be 450 books with a wordage of nearly 500 millions. The compilation of this set of Collections and Annals started in 1979 under the joint sponsorship of the Ministry of Culture, the State Nationalities Affairs Commission and all related societies for the study of folk literature and art. 50,000 people including cultural workers of China's 56 nationalities have taken part in the work from general survey, in-depth exploration and systematic sorting of the material in the grass-roots level to final compilation and publication. Approximately 100 million yuan RMB (approximately US\$12,200,000) have been invested, of which around 8 million yuan RMB (approximately US\$980,000) are from the Central Government. To date, 102 volumes or 142 books have been published, and the entire work is planned to be completed in the year 2003. The Collections and Annals contain all the fruits of national folk literature and art in the above-

mentioned 10 fields, which are recorded, compiled and published in the forms of words, notations, illustrations and sound recordings. In the meantime, many of the source material (written notes, sound and video recordings) being used as elementary material have been exploited and preserved by rescue measure. What the Collection and Annals have collected includes almost everything in the field of folklore except arts and crafts, architecture and decorations, local delicacies and cuisine. In the field of ethnic and folk culture, such a project, having so wide-ranging contents, employing so tremendous amount of manpower and costing so huge sum of money, is both unprecedented and rare at home and abroad, and is known as "the Great Wall of national traditional culture".

II

As mentioned above, traditional exploitation and utilization of folklore is moreover an effective method of preservation and protection. As viewed from the angle of economics, folklore is also a kind of social resources, very rich in potentialities for economic exploitation. Many in the economic circles think that contemporary economic competition is focused on high technology and as well on high cultural content. The exploitation of economic value of folklore is without doubt one of the important aspects of economic growth in modern society.

The essence of economic value of folklore lies in its unique socio-historical value. Mass participation is the basic feature of folklore and its richness and diversity are shown where its glamour lies. By grasping these features and making good use of the distinctive glamour of folklore, we can make folklore become the inexhaustible resource in economic exploitation.

The richness of folklore is self-evident. Take the national folk dances in Yunnan Province as an example, dances that merely imitate animals are those of fish, peacock, dragon, butterfly, elephant, tiger, white crane, lion, zhima (horses etc. made of paper and burned as offerings to the dead), monkey, (playing with) cow, (respect for) sheep, egret, roc, and so on. Stage properties for the dances include drum, sword, fan, shield, handkerchief, towel, oxtail etc. and altogether more than 40 different kinds. Drum dance alone has a great variety, such as the Dai nationality's dances of big drum, water drum, xiangjiao drum (a drum on a pedestal shaped like an elephant's leg) and bee drum; the Bai nationality's dance of octagonal drum; the Zhuang nationality's dance of bronze drum; the Hani nationality's dances of big drum, mang (busy) drum; yiche (carriage used by the Yis) drum; the Yi nationality's dances of flower drum, four-tube drum; the Va nationality's dances of wooden drum, bamboo drum, and so on. According to research, in Henan Province which is located in the Central Plains of China, there are as many as over 240 kinds of ethnic and folk dances, very varied and colorful, including over 10 kinds of dances of the lantern such as wei (enclosure) lantern, ground lantern, dragon lantern, nine-lotus lantern, cloud lantern; approximately 20 kinds of dances of the drum as swinging drum, battle drum, waist drum, flower drum, and also fan dance, umbrella dance, dragon dance and so on and so forth.

In the final analysis, the property of diversity is precisely that of difference, and is the prerequisite for different cultures to assimilate, complement and depend on each other. Different regions of a nation, different nationalities of a country and different areas and countries of the world rely exactly on the property of difference to prove their identity and existence. Today when globalization appear in many spheres of our world, this piece of the Pure Land, having been preserved on account of individual differences of various cultural units

among the pluralistic cultures has even more become the only place deeply cherished by people. What is most fascinating of folklore is its characteristic full of distinctive individuality and the colorful world it has formed. People who travel as tourists to all parts of the world are after nothing but the uncanny workmanship and ever-changing phenomena of Nature, or the skillful craftsmanship and artistic conception of the personified Nature, or the enchantment, loveliness and radiant splendor of local conditions and customs. According to the statistics of the World Travel Organization, tourism has sustained and sped up its growth since 1990s and demonstrates that it is the most vigorous sector of the economy. As viewed from the fact that the Middle East region has the highest growth rate (12%) in tourist earnings, the role played by culture especially folklore cannot be underestimated. China's tourist industry has readjusted its strategy of development since 1980s and achieved great success by taking national style, folk customs and local conditions as the focal point of development of tourist resources. According to China Statistic Yearbook, the number of tourists in 1980 reached 5,702,500 and foreign exchange earnings amounted to 617 million US dollars; and in 1990 the number increased to 27,461,800 and foreign exchange earnings to 2,218 million US dollars, then in 1995 the National Tourism Administration launched the activities of " '95 Tourist Year of Folk Customs" by concentrating on the tourist hot spots and in 1996 foreign exchange earnings amounted to 10.2 billion US dollars, ranking ninth in the world.

Broad mass participation is the basis of economic potentialities of folklore. For example, a temple fair was originally a kind of mass sports activities to worship and offer sacrifices to temple gods, later has become a sort of surroundings relatively centralized with various folklore activities, and some economic factors have gradually been infiltrated too. The difference in economic results is quite obvious, and lies in whether there are activities of temple fairs or not. For instance, the Laojun Temple in Jiasong Township of Zhenping County, Henan Province collected 6,303 yuan RMB (US\$770) of worshippers' donations in the whole year of 1987, however, in 1988 a temple fair was held for three days and collected nearly 10,000 yuan RMB (US\$1,220). In addition, catering services and commodity trading activities in coordination with the temple fair had a lot of extra earnings. Visitors to the three-day fair totaled about 100,000, and the volume of sales of cooked food reached more than 20,000 kilos. This example of a rather traditional flavor can prove that folklore activities possess fairly large economic potentialities. For the past several years, in cases of promotional sales of "culture as the stage, economy as the actor", folklore is always one of the indispensable supporting roles. Whether it is "Dalian Clothing Festival", "Qingdao Beer Festival", "Beijing Daxing Watermelon Festival" or "Hainan Coconut Festival", all are like that without exception, not to mention various new and developing activities during festivals and celebrations where culture is playing the leading role more and more often, such as "Harbin Ice and Snow Festival", "Yueyang Dragon Boat Festival of Hunan Province", "Weifang Kite Festival of Shandong Province" and "Merry-making Festival of Guangdong Province", etc. At all these festivals, activities related to ethnic and folk culture and art were what fascinated people most. "The Merry-making Festival of Guangdong Province" in 1988 attracted 350,000 tourists, Chinese and foreigners.

III

Traditionally folklore of our nationalities bears a character of public good. Firstly, it originates from people's daily life, its purpose is to help people relax, amuse themselves and to make their wishes, but not for commercial profit. Secondly, our country has the tradition to attach more importance to agriculture than commerce, even today, some of our minority nationalities, like some Tibetan groups, regard it a shame if their goal of activities is to make money.

There are mainly three occasions of traditional folklore activities: 1. Patriarchal clan gatherings, such as marriages, funeral rites, birthday ceremonies and other important events of the patriarchal clans. 2. Religious rites, such as receiving God and warding away evil spirits, worshipping Buddhism and ancestors rituals, etc. 3. Folklore festivals, for example, Spring Festival, Mid-Autumn Festival of Han nationality, Xuedun Festival of Tibetans, Water Splashing Festival of Dais, Torch Festival of Yi nationality, etc. In connection with this, the traditional folklore activities and their economic support are fundamentally divided into two patterns: First, the individual is the basic unit, it raises funds by itself and makes fun itself, for instance, flying kites, making paper-cuts of window decoration, making Zongzi (a pyramid-shaped dumpling of glutinous rice wrapped in bamboo or reed leaves, eaten during the Dragon Boat Festival), pasting up Spring Festival couplets, doing knitting and embroidery, etc. Second, it is completely organized by people, it raises funds from public and gets the public to be involved, for example, tournaments, village theatrical performances, temple fairs and other festivals. In the latter pattern, in case the time, the occasion, the size and the necessity are considered appropriate, the Government is also involved in the organizing work and giving financial support .

Owing to the strong influence of tradition, folklore in our country still remains fundamentally to be the type of public welfare, even when the country has already embarked on a socialist market economy. But, by reviewing the past, the economic value of some types of folklore has been exploited in various degrees. Let's compare the two patterns of activities and their economic support which as mentioned above, the exploitation degree of the first pattern is much higher than that of the second. For instance, there are always people down the history who are engaged in such trades as making and selling New Year pictures, Spring Festival scrolls, paper-cuts, clay figurines, dough figurines, kites, gold and silver ornaments, knitting and embroidery goods, and even others like making paper banknote burned for the dead, grave-clothes, firecrackers, joss sticks and candles, local delicacies, etc. Since we carried out the reform and open policy with economic construction as the center from early 1980s, this pattern of folklore has developed and the traders benefited ahead of all the others.

In the new period of development, the economic value of folklore is more and more recognized by the people. More manpower, investments and materials are pooled in gradually and it presents a characteristic of diversity in management and forms.

In respect of management, it changes from mainly individual exploitation to individual, collective and state exploitation concurrently. Individual exploitation remains mainly to be centered in arts and crafts, small commodities, food, unique skill performances, etc. There are some wealthy individuals, who have opened folklore museums. While displaying and selling folklore products, they also invite craftsmen to make and show their products on the spot, and develop their business in combination with tourism. The Wanbo Culture City situated in

Nandaihe, beautiful summer resort of Hebei Province, belongs to this category. The priority of state exploitation is mainly large scale folklore festivals and grand celebrations such as the Memorial Ceremony for the Mausoleum Xuanyuan Huangdi sponsored by Shanxi Province, and China Folk Arts Festivals since 1989, and the like.

Through exploration and management for a period of time, the folklore activities either sponsored by the individual, the collective or the state have accumulated rich experiences and the economic returns are steadily rising. Since Beijing started to resume the Ditan (Altar of Earth) Temple Fair for celebrating the Spring Festival in 1985, it has been followed by the Longtan Temple Fair, Baiyun Temple Fair and Grand View Garden "Dream of the Red Mansions" Temple Fair, but all these Temple Fairs lost money without exception in the earlier years. Now more and more Temple Fairs, large and small, have appeared, each has found ways to make money, the economic benefits are generally good. The Longtan Temple Fair, the largest in size at present, received a certain amount of Government financial support in 1986 and 1987, but only several tens of thousand people visited because its activities were not so attractive. Since 1988, a kind of mechanism called "official supervision and operation by the people" was gradually introduced which means the organizers assume sole responsibility for the profits or losses and participating units share the risks together, it has gradually formed its own folklore characteristics, the number of visitors has shot up to a million, 1.2 million people in 1997, the income from the admission tickets only amounted to 6 million yuan RMB (approximately US\$740,000).

There are more and more ways used to exploit folklore and varieties of innovations added to the activities. It becomes very common that folk songs and dances are performed in hotels and restaurants to entertain and solicit customers. It is already very popular that flower fairs, lantern fairs, Yangge dance (a popular rural folk dance), folk songs and dances appear simultaneously at commodity fairs to promote trade. Ethnic Culture Villages, Folklore Gardens, Nationality Parks in Beijing, Shenzhen, Guizhou and Yunnan Provinces together with World Window and World Park with folklore performances have become very thriving and profitable business. Recently in Beijing, there appears a kind of "Handicrafts Buffet Restaurant" which requires customers to join and make fun by doing crafts. The restaurant provides the customers with raw materials, such as clay, unbleached and undyed cloth, paper, flowers and tools and lets the customers make by their own hands this kind of crafts: potteries, wax printings, artificial flowers, flower arrangements, colored drawings, clay sculptures, and so on. The customers are satisfied because of their participation in person and the organizers make profit from it.

In short, the economic potential of folklore exploitation has already shown good momentum in its development.

IV

Of course, in the process of economic exploitation of folklore, in dealing with the relationship between protection and exploitation and between protection of folk culture heritages and economic construction, we are still faced with problems and contradictions, some hard to solve. There are five aspects of problems which should be solved at the moment.

1. To speed up the process of legalization. The two important statutes: "Regulations on the Preservation of Ethnic and Folk Cultural Traditions of the People's Republic of China" and "Regulations on the Protection of Folk Literature and Art Copyright of the People's Republic of China" were drafted and proofed since 1985 up to now, they are still in the stage of soliciting opinions. The latter Regulations won high appraisal in January 1996 from WIPO that had been asked for criticisms. But both Regulations have not been promulgated and put into effect owing to different reasons. If we have such regulations like the above two which have clear limits for application and full legal effect in respect of folklore preservation and exploitation, it will undoubtedly help us to do the work better.

2. To further define the main department of administrative jurisdiction. There are so many departments related to folklore, such as those of culture, tourism, gardens and parks, religion, commerce, physical culture, public health, public security and people's Associations of Literature and art and some scientific research institutions, all of which are involved to varying degrees in the economic exploitation of folklore as the main administrative department needs to be defined, the contradiction between protection and exploitation can not be effectively solved by coordinated and joint efforts of the departments concerned. The related departments are prompted by their respective interests and are not liable to consider from a long-term point of view the problem of preserving folklore resources. Such being the case, the economic exploitation of folklore on the whole still remains in a spontaneous and semi-spontaneous state. An obvious example is that there is still no department at the moment to analyze and assess matters relating to the scope of the trade, the employed, input and output as well as the methods and results of economic operation of different types of folklore, not to speak of carrying out reasonable exploitation and utilization step by step in a planned way and with protective measures.

3. To tap new financial resources in order to solve the basic need of funds. Owing to lack of adequate financial support, many important folklore resources can not be properly protected. With regard to the above-mentioned the "The Ten Collections the Chinese National Folk Culture", due to shortage of funds, necessary conditions for protection cannot be guaranteed, a great number of basic materials have again been scattered among the people or have become moth-eaten and mildewy, thus being gradually reduced to waste. About 150,000 reels of audio-video tapes are in danger of being demagnetized. In the past, people's cultural organizations or government departments in charge were often not the chief beneficiary of folklore or folklore-related activities, therefore, only a small amount of money earned could be used for preservation, protection and development of folklore. This situation should be changed. When the country is not rich enough and unable to put more money to the use of protection of folklore, it seems advisable that a proper ratio of the income mainly from the folklore activities may be drawn to set up a folklore protection and development fund.

4. To strengthen the management of cultural resources to prevent infringement to folklore. Some organizations and individuals have little awareness to preserve cultural resources and some even forget what is right at the sight of profit, they engage in improper exploitation of folklore, and thus play a destructive role with respect to folklore. In some places, some people have pop songs and karaoke songs to be recorded on audio-video tapes of source materials; some sell or transfer the possession of the basic materials of the Ten Collections and Annals just for a pittance of profit; some overseas people try every means fair or foul to gain by cheating the basic materials of the Ten Collections and Annals for seeking exorbitant profits, thus infringing the copyright and other rights of folklore. In certain places, some economic

bodies lure away by higher pay a great many performers from professional folk song and dance ensembles, such kind of exploitation ---- the method of "killing the hen to get the eggs" ---- greatly affects the work of collection and collation of folk arts. Some performances by incompetent people have also reduced many valuable folklore treasures depreciatory. Some substandard products passed off as good ones have damaged the reputation of genuine excellent folk arts and crafts. Some feudal superstition activities under the guise of folklore could not carry forward but on the contrary corrode and destroy the national cultural tradition. To solve this problem, it is necessary to strengthen the publicity of preserving cultural resources on the one hand, and to perfect relevant policies, adopt effective measures and further enhance the management on the other.

5. To carry out appraisal work of the important and valuable heritage of folklore. The World Commission on Culture and Development in its report *Our Creative Diversity* pointed out that it is a universal problem that the protection of intangible cultural heritage lags behind that of tangible one. However, "It is both physically and economically impossible to preserve all the vestiges of the past. And dare we even attempt to do so when the money and energy may be better spent helping people meet basic needs?"(P.177) The contradiction between the rich folklore heritage in our country and its not too strong comprehensive national power as a developing country is outstanding, and it is even more so if China is compared with other countries. Perhaps it is most sensible to discriminate and appraise folklore by pooling together some efforts and to carry out effective protection and reasonable utilization in order of priority, then step by step, in a planned way and in an orderly arrangement. In line with the "Guidelines for the Establishment of a Living Human Treasures" of UNESCO and by making reference to experiences of some other countries, we are now doing preparatory work in this respect.

Folklore is not only the national property of its birth place, but also the valuable wealth of all mankind. With the rapid changes of modern society, it is disappearing in great quantity, but it is a good fortune in the midst of bad ones that this situation has aroused serious attention of the international community. As a member state of the UNESCO and WIPO, Chinese Government greatly praises the two organizations for their efforts in this field and has made a positive response to the series of demands raised by them. We have achieved great success too. While we keep our promise to the international community, we also expect that the latter will further strengthen their cooperation and take a special interest in and render support to this ancient Oriental country which has a civilization of 5,000 years with one quarter of world population and possesses numerous tangible and intangible cultural heritage.

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