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ART OF DANCING IN NEW CHINA

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DURING these days many Indian dancers have made their reports on the experiences of various kinds of dances in their respective localities. This gives me a valuable opportunity to learn. Today, on the occasion of discussing the art of dancing of South-East Asia, please allow me to give a brief introduction on the development of the Chinese art of dancing.

The Chinese art of dancing has a history of more than 3,000 years. It has had its glorious times and made contributions to the world treasure of art. However, due to the oppression of foreign imperialism and domestic feudal forces in the last century, the art of dancing in China lagged behind along with the backwardness in the fields of her politics and economy. Many precious dances of ancient days were out of practice and many national dances had no chance to develop; even vanished in the course of time; only in the art of opera it has been somewhat elaborately preserved. But dancing does not stand independently. It is a part

of the combined art of opera of songs, music and drama.

Since the founding of New China in 1949, the art of dancing of our country has been growing with the development of the national economic construction and the increasing improvement of the material and cultural life of the people.

Opera Theatres

Today, we have 15 big opera theatres in different regions such as in the Northeast, Northwest, Southwest, Southeast and Central China and each has a dance troupe attached to it. In Peking, there is the Central Practice Opera Institute. Every province has its own folk song and dance troupe numbering 17 in all, and every region of the national minorities has its own national song and dance troupe, 31 in number. There are 23 troupes in enterprises. All these dance troupes have done a great deal of work since their establishment.

For the sake of developing art of folk songs and dances more effectively and extensively, the Ministry of Culture has organized national folk song and dance festivals once every other year since 1951. During these national festivals, distinguished dancers are found and many fine works are discovered. Such kind of festivals are also organized in the different provinces and regions of national minorities. Such measures adopted by the cultural department of the government afford professional dancers continuous opportunities of learning and of absorbing art substance created by the people, thus leading to a better appreciation of people's art of their fatherland and at the same time enriching the contents of the performances of the troupes.

First Dance School

For a further uplift of the level of the art of dancing, the skill of the dancers must be raised and regular training be given to performers. For this purpose, the State set up the first dance school in the autumn of 1954. It consists of two departments: the national dance-drama department and the ballet department; the former provides courses in Chinese classical and folk dances and the latter in ballet and European folk dances. Besides, there are two other classes, the one is the Training Class for Writers and Directors of Dance-Drama, which trains personnel of writing and directing dance-drama and for dance teachers; the other is the Eastern Dance Class which is set up for the purpose of further learning from the achievements of the art of dancing in Asian countries, as a result of our increasingly prosperous cultural relations with the other countries in recent years. A study of the Indian dances also forms a part of the whole plan.

In recent years, while carrying on the work for research, compilation and creation of folk dances, our workers in the art of dancing have been doing the same in respect of the classical dances. This work is being done in two ways: the one is that the Chinese Classical Dance Research Group of the dance school carries on the scientific research work of the basic training and teaching methods of the classic dances. Here, first of all, they learn from the old artists and then single out the dances from

the opera, classify the basic gestures and then carry on the scientific research work, and the other way is that the Ancient Dance History Research Group of the Chinese Dance Research Association carries on the research work on the historical materials of our ancient dances.

Some Experiences

Since liberation, due to the great attention paid by the State department concerned, and with the efforts exerted by the dance artists themselves, our art of dancing is developing day by day and much has been done in collecting and compiling the folk dances, studying classical dances, encouraging creative works, training young dancers, teachers and directors, etc. Please allow me to put before you some of our experiences in this connection.

First we pursue a policy of "Let flowers of many kinds blossom side by side and weed through the old to let the new emerge".

"Let flowers of many kinds blossom" means that different kinds of arts in all their branches may exist and grow. Artists have the freedom to choose subject matters, themes, methods of creation, form and style of their own works; they have the freedom to criticise and have mutual criticism. Criticism should be helpful to the construction and development of the art and culture of the people.

This means that an artist has full freedom in working for the interest of the people and in the interest of building new national culture. In this way, different kinds and styles of arts will be blooming like hundreds and thousands of beautiful blossoms in the big garden of the country.

"Weed through the old to let the new emerge" means that new art can emerge and develop only by inheriting the traditions of the old and by fully absorbing the nutritive elements after unceasing study of the result of the old art.

This policy, "Let flowers of many kinds blossom, weed through the old to let the new emerge" has laid the basis for the growth of art, and at the same time, has pointed to the future course of all kinds of art. By implementing this policy, the variety of dance has

become colourful; for instance, there are Chinese classical and folk dances, folk dances of minorities, foreign ballets, Asian dances like Indian dance, Indonesian dance, etc. Take, for instance, the performances of the Dance School, within three and a half years they performed 88 works, including those composed by six minorities and 11 foreign countries. If one drop of water may give one the idea of the sea, then we can easily find the colourful flourishing prospects of all the dance circles for this young Dance School.

Secondly, we lay stress on inheriting the glorious traditions of national art.

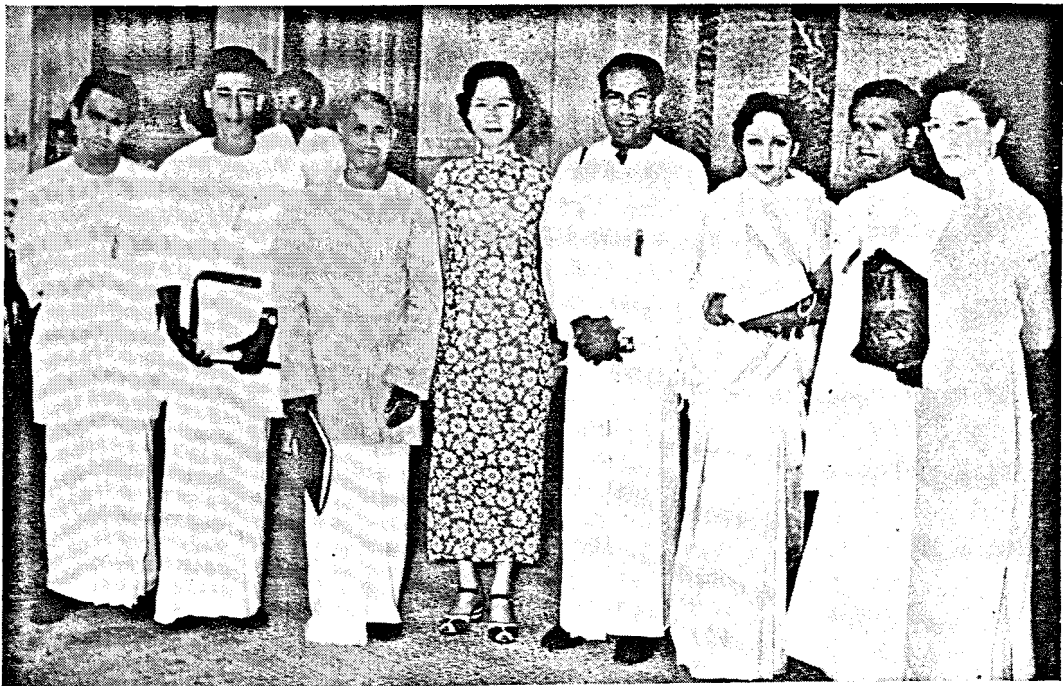
National Tradition

Our stress on national tradition of art is based on the view that any kind of art is after all the reflection of the people's life, and there could be no art that does not reflect the people's life of a nation. Therefore, art has a strong national character. A nation which wants to develop its own art, should not cut itself off from its national tradition. On the contrary, it should inherit such tradition and further develop it.

The principle of inheriting national art tradition in China is to throw away its dross and to absorb its essence. It is to throw away all the rotten things of the feudal ruling class that distorted people's life, insulted them, and to develop what really reflect people's life, their good wishes and ambitions, and what can really preserve the dignity and independence of the nation.

According to our experiences, to implement this policy correctly is not an easy matter. There appear two tendencies: one is too "conservative", that is a tendency of regarding the heritage of the ancient art as a holy thing which should not be disturbed; the other tendency is rushing ahead, treating art in a rough manner, removing all the characteristics and merits of the original art. These two tendencies should be opposed, for they are harmful to the development of art.

To avoid these two tendencies, the correct course is to lay emphasis on the learning and studying of the traditions of national art, study their characteristics and rules. In creating our art, we have successful as well as unsuccessful
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Guru Guneya (third from left) and some other artists at a reception given by the Chinese Embassy.

experiences. In the past two years, we have made efforts to make the classical and folk dances to reflect subjects in reality. We have obtained some experiences in this respect.

Thirdly, to learn and absorb beneficial international art experiences.

To emphasize the inheritance of national art traditions does not mean to exclude learning and absorbing international art experiences. On the contrary, if we do not accept the international art as reference and to absorb its essence, the development of national art tradition will definitely be restricted.

We oppose the viewpoint of looking down upon national art, while we also oppose the narrow sectarian viewpoint of national culture which holds that only the art of the nation itself is good, and the art of other countries and nations is not worthy of a glance. This viewpoint can bring nothing good to our

art. It has been proved by facts that the performances of the art ensembles from East European countries and Asian countries in China have been helpful to the development of the Chinese dance art.

To develop the dance art of our country, we must apply the policy of "Let many kinds of flowers blossom, weed through the old to let new emerge", we must inherit and develop the national art tradition as well as absorb the experiences of the progressive international art of dancing. And in this way art can serve the people better. Now, in our country, though a great deal of work has been done in this field, yet, it is evident that the demands of the people's cultural life, which are rising with the day, still cannot be fully met.

What I have said is just a brief account of the Chinese dance art and some personal experiences. Any comment and criticism will be appreciated.