

## Directive on Opera Reform Work by the GAC

(May 5, 1951)

People's opera is an important weapon for educating the people with democratic and patriotic spirits. China has a rich heritage of opera closely connected with the people, and it is essential to inherit and carry forward this heritage. Within this heritage, many parts were previously used by feudal rulers as tools to numb and harm the people. Therefore, it is necessary to distinguish between good and bad, make choices, and transform and develop on a new basis to align with the interests of the country and the people.

Over the past year, opera reform work in various regions has achieved remarkable results. New operas have emerged and gained widespread popularity among the masses. Many artists have acquired new knowledge and perspectives, becoming the backbone of the opera reform movement. However, there are also some shortcomings in the work, the most significant of which is the lack of a unified standard for reviewing scripts. Additionally, there are tendencies of anti-historical and formalistic inclinations in the process of script editing and modification.

The National Opera Work Conference convened by the Ministry of Culture of the Central People's Government in November 1950 reviewed the situation of opera reform work in various regions and put forward the guiding principles for the current work. After hearing the report of this conference, the GAC hereby issues the following directives:

### 1. Directive on Opera Content Standards and Reform Measures

The primary task of opera is to promote the new patriotic spirit of the people, inspiring heroism in the revolutionary struggle and the heroism of the masses in their primary labor. Operas that propagate resistance against aggression, opposition to oppression, love for the motherland, freedom, and labor, as well as praise for the just and benevolent character of the people, should be encouraged and promoted. Conversely, operas that advocate feudal and slave morality, promote barbarism, terror, or indecent and corrupt behaviour, and vilify or insult the working people should be opposed. Educational authorities in various regions must responsibly review staged performances based on the above standards. They should not allow unregulated development but instead adopt an approach of proactive reform. Reforms should rely on the collaboration of a broad spectrum of artists, involve them in the joint review, modification, and creation of scripts, and make appropriate use of newspapers and periodicals for opera critiques. In general, administrative orders to ban performances should be avoided. Operas with significant harm to the people that require prohibition should be handled uniformly by the Ministry of Culture of the Central People's Government, and local authorities should not act arbitrarily.

2. In the current opera reform, priority should be given to reviewing widely popular existing plays. Necessary and appropriate modifications should be made to address undesirable content and performance methods. It is essential to eliminate ideological content that has significant harmful effects and remove elements that are barbaric, terrifying, indecent, enslaving, insulting to one's own nationality, or contrary to patriotic sentiments. For existing plays or modified good plays, they should be acknowledged as part of the national tradition and continue to promote their healthy,

progressive, and beautiful elements. When modifying existing scripts, attention should be paid to not deviating from historical truth and ensuring the educational impact on the people. Opera reform is a crucial task within the broader scope of cultural and artistic transformation. It unavoidably encounters numerous complex issues, necessitating a systematic approach. Generally, the reform should commence with the genres that are easiest to address and garner the consensus of the majority of artists, gradually expanding the scope. It is essential to guard against impatience and the adoption of harsh measures resulting from hasty emotions in the opera reform work.

Chinese opera encompasses a rich variety of forms that should be universally revitalized and developed. Encourage free competition among various opera forms to foster diversity in artistic expression. Local operas, especially folk small operas, with their simpler and lively forms that readily reflect modern life and are easily accepted by the masses, deserve special attention. Local opera improvement efforts should prioritize the reform and development of genres with the most significant impact on local communities. To achieve this, collect, document, and publish scripts, both new and old, of local operas and folk small operas for research and improvement purposes. If conditions permit, an annual national opera competition should be held to showcase achievements in various genres, rewarding outstanding works and performances to guide further development.

3. Traditional Chinese performance art forms, such as drumming and storytelling, are simple yet rich in expressive capabilities. They should be given due attention. Besides creating new lyrics for these art forms, familiar historical stories and beautiful folk legends should be transformed and adopted.

4. Opera artists bear a heavy responsibility in the entertainment and education of the people. They should strengthen their political, cultural, and professional studies to elevate their skills. Educational institutions should earnestly organize artist education, actively nurturing the lower echelons of opera reform work. For itinerant traditional opera troupes in rural areas that cannot undergo centralized training, opera reform workers can be dispatched to provide education, assist in rehearsing new productions, and support their overall improvement. New literary and artistic workers should actively participate in opera reform, engaging in mutual learning and close collaboration with opera artists. They should contribute to script modifications, creation, and the improvement of opera music and stage arts.

#### 5 Reforming Unreasonable Systems in Traditional Opera Troupes

Certain outdated systems within traditional opera troupes, such as the old apprentice system, foster-daughter system, and the "encouragement and reward system," seriously violate human rights and the interests of artists. These systems should be reformed gradually, with the reform primarily relying on the conscious and voluntary participation of the artist community.

#### 6: Unified Leadership for Opera Work

Opera work should be centrally led by local cultural and educational authorities. Provinces should establish exemplary troupes and theaters based on existing well-established troupes and venues. Following the principle of enterprise comparison, they should adopt public, public-private partnership, or private operation with public assistance to regularly perform new productions, improve venue management, and serve as focal points for promoting local opera reform.

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