

*On Proper Evaluation and Treatment of the Cultural  
Heritage of  
Our Nation with a Correct Viewpoint and Attitude*

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Talk to the Officials of the Propaganda and Agitation Department of  
the Central Committee of the Workers' Party of Korea

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Recently, the great leader made a profound analysis of how the cultural heritage of our nation has been dealt with, and on the basis of this, he set forth the specific task of properly implementing our Party's policy on inheriting national cultural heritage.

In order to carry out the great leader's instructions on the inheritance and development of our nation's cultural legacy, it is important to evaluate and deal properly with it from a correct viewpoint and attitude.

To have such a correct viewpoint and attitude is fundamental to building a working-class culture.

From the first day of building a new country, the great leader put forward a correct policy on proper inheritance and development of the nation's cultural heritage and has led wisely its implementation. As a result, the precious national cultural heritage created by our ancestors has been preserved excellently in our country and valued highly in our times.

Recently, however, a number of narrow-minded persons have committed a series of deviations in dealing with our cultural birthright. On the pretext of opposing feudal-Confucian ideas, some officials in the fields of art and culture blindly renounce all the cultural heritages created by our nation in the course of our long history, and prohibit our people from dancing the dances and singing the songs that have been handed down and

enjoyed by them since ancient times. This deviation is due to our officials' misunderstanding of our nation's cultural heritage.

We must have a clear understanding of our own cultural legacy and a correct viewpoint and attitude to it.

We are a resourceful people who have a history of 5,000 years and a brilliant cultural tradition. The history of our people is one of honourable struggle to free themselves from the fetters of nature and oppression by society; it is a history of the creation of innumerable cultural treasures that bear witness to the resourcefulness and talent of our nation.

Art and literature reflect the social system, life and customs of the people in a given period. The murals of an ancient tomb in Kangso, for instance, represent the socio-political system of the powerful feudal state of Koguryo, the economic and cultural life and customs of the people in those days. They give us a glimpse of the level of their development and artistic talents.

It is true of course that the art and literature created in the past reflect the thoughts and tastes of the exploiting class that ruled society in those days. The works of art our ancestors produced dealt mostly with flowers, mountains, clouds, bamboo, wild geese and other natural objects, rather than with human lives. Even when portraying people, they depicted feudal rulers as being beautiful and working people as mean, ugly and foolish. To do this was not the artists' intention, but the result of the pressure put upon them by feudal rulers, whose purpose was to oppress and exploit the masses while hiding the contradictions in society and setting themselves up as special beings. Nevertheless, those paintings are still priceless cultural treasures even after a long lapse of time because they represent the lives and desires of our people as well as the high level of their artistic talents.

It is the same with classical literary works. *The Tale of Chun Hyang*, well-known to our people and enjoyed by them, was handed down orally for a long time before being turned into

literature. It reflects the desire of a boy and a girl to live in a world in which they might love each other freely, a world that could be attained only by doing away with the feudal caste system. However, in *The Tale of Chun Hyang*, the desire of the exploited and oppressed masses of people is realized by the secret royal inspector, thereby justifying and praising the unfair feudal system.

If we discarded all the literary works of the past indiscriminately, simply because they contain feudal and capitalist elements, nothing would remain of our history, and our nation would be seen as having created nothing in the past.

Just as there could be no present without the past, and no innovation would be conceivable without precedents, so socialist national art and literature can never come from nothing. Socialist national art and literature can be built and developed by discarding the outdated, reactionary elements from the art and literature of the past, and inheriting and promoting the progressive and popular elements from them in conformity with the requirements of the times and class character. This is the process, governed by its own laws and logic, of building a socialist national culture.

In order to inherit and develop national culture properly, it is necessary to evaluate and deal with it in a correct way.

When evaluating an article of our cultural heritage, individual officials must not deal with it at random according to their own subjective judgement. They must get together and give careful consideration to the times and socio-historical circumstances in which the article was created, and to the requirements of our revolution. On the basis of this, they must deal with it prudently.

Some time ago, some officials of the Ministry of Culture prohibited the performance of the *Sadang dance*, enjoyed by our people from old times, saying that it was a dance performed in temples in the old days. The *Sadang dance* has no set pattern; it

is danced extemporaneously and with dexterous movements. It is simple yet beautiful and full of national feelings.

A dance movement from old times must not be discarded simply because it is old. It is not easy to obtain a dance movement. Even ancient court dances or temple dances are valuable legacies that have been improved and perfected in the course of hundreds or thousands of years. Even a single dance movement is permeated with the wisdom and talents of our nation and expresses the people's feelings. Therefore, we must bear in mind that it is the precious property of our nation which cannot be bartered for anything.

We must not adopt a nihilistic attitude towards the cultural heritage of our nation but must treasure it.

It is not a bad thing to let the younger generation know the legends about Mt. Kumgang. Although one of those legends tells the fictitious story that fairies came down from heaven and took a bath in *Phaltam* Pool, it is unnecessary to suppress the stories about Mt. Kumgang: nobody believes them anyway.

Historical relics that need rehabilitation should be rehabilitated and preserved.

At one time there were a great number of historical relics in our country, but during the Fatherland Liberation War, many of them were bombed by the US imperialists or lost in some other way. It is not necessary to rebuild all the relics, but only famous and typical ones must be rehabilitated and preserved. This will give our people an opportunity to see the ancient architecture of our country and let the younger generation know the history and culture of their own nation.

While opposing nihilism towards our national cultural heritage, we must also reject the kind of restorationist attitude that sees all the things of the past in a favourable light and revives them without discrimination.

We must always deal with the national cultural heritage on a class basis and appraise it according to the interests of our

revolution. Some of the national cultural heritage of the past is progressive, some is reactionary and even gives distorted accounts of historical facts. We must revive those parts that are beneficial to our revolution and discard those that are detrimental.

As the great leader said, the story of Kija, for example, which was handed down by the feudal flunkeys, is a total lie and harmful to our revolution. In the old days some men who were infected with a servile attitude spread servility among people by inventing the preposterous lie that a foreigner, Kija by name, came to our country with several hundred technicians, founded a kingdom and developed science and culture. After liberation the great leader saw through the reactionary nature and falsehood of this story and saw to it that the mausoleum of Kija on Moran Hill was excavated. Nothing was found but a few broken pieces of brick and china. The story of Kija was found to be a fabrication that spread the idea of meniality and submission. We should thoroughly eliminate such things that are contrary to historical facts and harmful to our revolution.

We must also guard against the tendency to embellish individual persons or works of the past age and to distort them.

In the past some scholars spoke very highly of Jong Ta San and other proponents of the *Silhak* school, pronouncing him to be even more prominent than Marx. Of course, the doctrines of this school contained some progressive elements. But they can never be superior to Marxism, which for the first time presented the revolutionary ideas of the working class.

Other scholars exaggerated the value of the works of the past to such an extent that they even claimed these ancient works to be better than those of the present day. How can they be better than the works of art and literature today, which have been created on the basis of socialist realism? This is impossible.

We must thoroughly rebuff those erroneous views that praise and attempt to revive the outdated and reactionary elements of the past.

We oppose the tendency to overestimate Jong Ta San and other *Silhak* scholars, contrary to the fact, and distort history; nevertheless, we do not mean that the *Silhak* school should be ignored in history.

We should ensure that things of the past are shown or taught to our people so as to contribute to their education in socialist patriotism and communism.

We must clearly distinguish between progressive, popular elements and the outmoded, reactionary elements of the cultural heritage of our nation and inherit and develop the progressive, people-oriented elements critically, in keeping with modern aesthetic tastes and revolutionary requirements.

The great leader has instructed that for the correct evaluation and treatment of the national cultural heritage, it is necessary to form a state evaluation commission consisting of senior officials from Party and government bodies and those from educational, scientific, art and literary institutions.

This commission must examine all the books of the past one by one, distinguishing between those detrimental to the revolution and those that are not detrimental, and so appraise and deal with them correctly. Although some books of the past are progressive, they may not fit in with the demands of our times because of their writers' ideological immaturity and the limitation of the age in which they were written. Such books should be annotated and circulated so that people can read and get a clear understanding of them. In other words, it is necessary to give detailed notes about what is good in a book, together with what is bad and needs to be read critically.

The state evaluation commission must carefully deal with every piece of cultural heritage of the nation, taking a firm

position of assuming full responsibility before the Party, revolution, history and people.

We must explore the works of art and literature of the past in a thorough way, rearranging and reproducing them.

The great leader has pointed out that there were few works of art and literature published in the 1910s and 1920s, but that there might be good works that were unknown to our people at the time because they were not given publicity. We must discover these particular works of art and literature, as well as the revolutionary works produced in the 1930s.

We also need to find more good examples of classical literature and ensure that some of them, which were written in Chinese ideographs, be translated into our language so that our people might read them. Some of them can be rewritten on the basis of the original.

The most valuable pieces of classical literature may be adapted to the screen or stage.

In this case, they should not be adapted fully as they are. If *The Tale of Chun Hyang*, for example, is to be turned into an opera, it should not be performed in *phansori* today simply because it was performed thus in the past. *Phansori* is a husky voice used by nobles in former times to sing while drinking. Because *phansori* is husky and has no distinctions between male and female voices, it does not suit the thoughts and sentiments of our contemporaries. Therefore, the classic national operas should be performed in a sweet, gentle and clear voice full of national feelings.

In adapting the classical works of our nation in conformity with the demands and aesthetic feelings of our times, we must not modernize them blindly or in disregard of the socio-historical background of the original works. Shortly after liberation, while producing the drama *The Tale of Sim Chong*, creative workers omitted the scene in which Sim Chong, who was sold for 300 *som* of rice to be offered to Buddha in order to

have her blind father's eyes opened, throws herself into the deep sea of Rimdangsu, but manages to come out alive to the world after meeting her dear mother at the palace of the Sea God. The scene was thrown out on the pretext that it was unscientific and unbelievable. They also changed the scene in which Sim Chong meets her father on the excuse that it was based on superstition, since the blind man regained his sight. The great leader saw the drama at that time and instructed that the practice of distorting the original contents of popular national classics should be discontinued. Today none of our people believe the story, even though the Sea God's palace and the Sea God himself are included in the works.

The principles of modernity and of being loyal to historical facts should be properly observed in the reproduction of the art and literature of the past.

In future we must stress works based upon revolutionary traditions and other works of revolutionary art and literature, and ensure that our classical national art and literature are reproduced in such a way as to make a more effective contribution to the revolutionary education of working people and to their education in socialist patriotism and communism.

We must have a correct understanding of foreign art and literature, as well as a proper viewpoint and attitude towards the national cultural heritage.

At present some officials prohibit the reading of foreign works on the excuse that they contain revisionist elements and so on. As a result, writers lack knowledge of the famous world classics, and senior officials are unable to read properly the *Selected Works of World Literature*.

One day, when I asked an official if he had ever read *The Decameron*, he said that he did not know even the name of the book. I told him that it was necessary to read the *Selected Works of World Literature* before directing the work being done in the field of art and literature.



In the past we had many foreign revolutionary works translated and published, but some officials prohibited the reading of any foreign books whatsoever, on the pretext of combating dogmatism and servility. This is a deviation from the Party's intention. We must examine all the foreign books that have already been translated and published, properly evaluate them, and on the basis of this, circulate them. We have to ensure that useful and necessary books are translated and published in future as well.

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