CURRENT ISSUES

A NEW CULTURAL REVOLUTION:
THE COMMERCIALISATION OF CULTURE IN CHINA

John Fitzgerald

While landmark cases of artistic liberalisation or repression have been appearing with their customary regularity in China over recent years, and receiving due attention among foreign scholars, a more profound development in the organisation and marketing of all manner of cultural services appears to have passed almost without notice. A small but significant portion of the cultural network in China has become commercialised in the sense that cultural production units have come to assume responsibility for their own profits and losses, and authority over their activities has been transferred from state and collective management to small groups and private individuals. The effects of this development have been felt in scattered areas for a few years in the form of the improved motivation, productivity and livelihood of artists working under the new regime, and in a private-sector rural cultural revival, but its political ramifications have only recently gained recognition even within China. The political aspects of this commercialisation are best described as structural devolution and ideological depoliticisation, the latter being quite distinct from political liberalisation but equally pernicious in the eyes of an administration which believes that media and the arts should exert a positive influence upon society. The problem attracted the attention of Premier Zhao Ziyang in June 1983 in a work report to the National People's Congress which was highly critical of the trend toward commercialism in the arts. Zhao's report was followed in July by a State Council circular on the same theme, then by a strident article published in the September issue of the Communist Party of China (CPC)'s central organ, the Red Flag, and subsequently by a directive issued under the auspices of the ongoing Party Rectification Movement. Concern expressed at such high levels is sufficient indication that commercialisation has gained considerable momentum in cultural circles.
The practical outcome of this official concern is, however, somewhat less predictable than the more or less inevitable outcome of a crackdown on mere ideological deviation in the arts. The CPC has accumulated considerable experience in dealing with conflict in its own ranks and recalcitrance among bureaucrats and cultural workers, and has come to expect that discipline and perseverance will prevail over all obstacles. This expectation rubs off easily onto outside observers, with the result that any indication of official intention to do away with commercialism in the arts is taken as a sign of its achievement. The complexity of the problems presented by commercialisation is disguised, in this type of analysis, by an overly simplistic explanation of how the phenomenon came about in the first place, viz. that 'fundamentally, commercialised literature and art arise because some writers and artists seek personal gains and have deviated from the orientation that their work should serve the people and socialism'. The roots of the development are in fact far more complex, and give cause to think that prescriptive attempts to put a halt to the commercialisation of culture will run foul of formidable new obstacles which are not simply ideological. I shall argue that commercialism in the arts is the direct outcome of new constraints and opportunities which have come to confront cultural workers since the Third Plenum of the Eleventh Central Committee held in December 1978. In the terms of an earlier Cultural Revolution, cultural commercialism is a reflection in the 'superstructure' of more fundamental developments elsewhere in the economy. The Cultural Revolution, building upon near complete collectivisation and state ownership in other areas of the economy, put an end to the last remnants of private enterprise in the arts; conversely, recent changes in the marketing of culture have taken place alongside the partial decollectivisation of agriculture and the reintroduction of financial incentives as stimuli to material production and commercial activity generally. The relationship between recent cultural and socio-economic developments is however not simply one of 'reflection', but one of direct cause and effect, as is evident in the nuts and bolts process of their parallel development which is the main focus of this article. With the primary aim of highlighting the complexity of the issue, I have confined my attention to peasants and to performing arts workers in the state sector, two groups whose separate experiences adequately illustrate the linkage between developments in the cultural sphere and those in the world at large.

**Peasant Household Enterprise**

The development of private enterprise in cultural affairs at the village level has been in part a reflection of the economic and political conditions which gave rise to the Agricultural Production Responsibility System (APRS) and at the same time a direct result of the introduction of the new system. The APRS, which in its most highly developed and currently most widespread
form assigns responsibility for agricultural operations to individual households (*baogan dao hu*), has proved popular in districts with a relatively low per capita income and a population which feels it has more to gain through individual rather than collective effort. Recent studies indicate that support for the APRS is found in roughly inverse proportion to support for the orthodox collective system, reaching from a minimal level in cases where peasants do well out of the collective to a maximum where peasants are dissatisfied with what the commune can offer them. Regional diversity has, therefore, become both the official slogan and the actual norm for the development of the APRS.7

The provision of collective or, alternatively, private cultural facilities follows an equally patchy pattern of distribution. The development of collective cultural facilities varies considerably, from a relatively high level in communes with healthy collective sectors to almost nothing in mountainous areas, border regions and minority zones.8 Private cultural facilities have arisen in the trail of the APRS, with a demand for privately-run television centres, reading-rooms, film-screening units and performing groups proving greatest in backward and remote areas where the collective system has failed to provide adequate cultural services in the past. The introduction of the APRS has in turn enhanced the demand for private cultural services in a number of ways. It has led in some cases to a reduction in the level of collective cultural services, both professional and amateur, as communes and subordinate units streamline their ancillary services in keeping with their declining status, and as cadres and peasants turn their undivided attention to material production. In some places, communal libraries and projection equipment have fallen into disrepair and disuse, while in others collective cultural facilities have been converted into granaries and processing plants.9 By no means all communes are experiencing a breakdown of cultural services to the same degree, and indeed the gross number of communal cultural centres has increased substantially over the past two years, from 28,000 in 1981 to 35,000 in 1983.10 In context, however, these figures do not point to a cultural renaissance taking place within the rural collective sector. Rural cultural work has been hampered all along by an extreme shortage of cultural facilities — only half of all communes could claim a single cultural centre at the start of 1982 — and by the concentration of available facilities in commune centres and market towns far removed from the dwellings of most peasants. The administrative reorganisation which has come in the wake of the APRS has done little to rectify such faults, and in fact appears to be exacerbating the problem of over-concentration of cultural facilities. On the one hand, the devolution of multiple production responsibilities to the household has effectively weakened the position of subordinate units within the commune system which would be the natural units for expanding collective cultural activities.
at the lower levels; on the other hand, the transfer of certain responsibilities from the commune to the higher country level has led to a new concentration of cultural facilities in county seats, where the number of cultural palaces has doubled over the past eighteen months. Another cultural casualty of the APRS, and of material incentives throughout the economy, has been the amateur performing network, which has by force of circumstance compensated in the past for the scarcity of visits by professional state troupes and for the deprivations of living far from centralised commune cultural facilities. In its heyday in the early 1960s the rural amateur system occupied an estimated seven million performers, but by 1983 it engaged less than a quarter of that number. Much has happened over the past twenty years and the APRS cannot be held entirely responsible for the decline of the amateur system. Nevertheless, wherever material incentives and personal production goals have come to replace the ‘big pot’ of communal living, they appear to have dampened whatever enthusiasm has remained for the amateur performing arts. While exerting a baleful influence on collective and amateur cultural activity, the APRS has also brought about an increase in the peasants’ disposable income and has introduced a model of legitimate household economic activity and an ethic of getting rich quickly. The interaction of these many elements of the APRS has produced the private peasant cultural entrepreneur and an audience prepared to pay well for entertainment to its liking.

In line with general trends in the countryside, the individual household has emerged as the standard unit for providing professional cultural services. The APRS, in addition to giving individual households responsibility for performing general production tasks, has given rise to a new phenomenon of professional specialised households which take upon themselves responsibility for highly specialised tasks such as food and cloth processing, transportation, offering technical advice, raising livestock, fish or poultry, and even providing more highly specialised services for specialised households themselves. Specialised households are as a rule more market-oriented than other households operating under the APRS, producing on average ten times the value of marketable goods produced by the other households. The number of specialised households currently operating on either a full or part-time basis makes up about ten per cent of all agricultural households in the country, reaching a height of twenty-five per cent in one province (Liaoning) and thirty-five per cent in one county (Ying County, Shanxi).

The number of households which specialise in professional cultural services has not been revealed, and doubtless amounts to only a tiny fraction of all specialised households, but it appears to be spread fairly widely across the nation and to have reached significant levels of concentration in some areas: private peasant cultural services have been reported in Jilin, Inner Mongolia, Hebei, Henan, Shandong, Hubei, Sichuan, Zhejiang and Guangdong, and
within a single county in Sichuan (Xinjin) there are said to be 120 households profiting from private cultural services.\textsuperscript{15}

The forms assumed by specialised culture households are as varied as the types of cultural activities in which they engage. Some set up their own facilities, while others enter into contracts with their communes to use collective facilities; some devote themselves exclusively to cultural work while others divide their time between cultural and agricultural or other sideline work; some are not organised as professional units at all, although such households appear to be managed by retired cultural workers and teachers and to specialise in educational facilities such as reading-rooms and art schools. The professional households are currently practising most varieties of the performing arts, including theatre, dance, folk music, storytelling, acrobatics and magic, and some specialise in providing physical facilities for the use of other culture-households and touring troupes.\textsuperscript{16}

Other culture-households have chosen to replicate on a miniature scale the form of commune culture centres, converting various parts of their houses into reading-rooms, tea-rooms, small shops and television-rooms.\textsuperscript{17}

Film-screening has also attracted the attention of private entrepreneurs, particularly in villages with poor access to collective projectors and theatres. Film-screening is in some respects more complex than other forms of household cultural activity, and has on this account forced the emerging private cultural network to develop to a higher stage and come into direct daily contact with the state cultural apparatus. In the first place, the initial capital needed to purchase a set of film projectors and electric generators is, at around 6,000 yuan, high by household standards, and although within the reach of some prosperous households is well beyond the resources of most. In consequence, informal groups of households have come to pool their resources and form what are in effect public film-screening companies which operate independently of the formal collective system.\textsuperscript{18} Early in 1983 one prefecture in Hubei (Xianning) could boast a total of 98 private projection teams of one kind or another, and a single county in Hebei (Renxian) contained twenty-three projection teams operating under joint household ownership.\textsuperscript{19} Even larger sums are required to build film and drama theatres, which are considered more than a luxury in areas where the climate severely hampers outdoor programmes. Private construction of a thousand-seat theatre costs in the order of 20,000 yuan, a target which demands co-operative enterprise. The target was met in one village in Shandong (Litaicun) by co-operation between seven households, and in a neighbouring village (Haotoucun) by an alliance of twenty-two households.\textsuperscript{20} Developments on this scale compel recognition by local and national cultural authorities, if only to define the legal rights and obligations of the shareholders. Private involvement in film-screening has also forced the pace in expanding direct contacts between private entrepreneurs and the
state and collective sectors. Film projection and major building construction cannot proceed without formal support and informal co-operation on the part of numerous state and collective bodies, ranging from provincial film-distribution corporations to local distributors of building materials and generator fuel. Hence the activities of households engaged in the film-screening business have brought about a significant level of integration between the private cultural sector and the state.

Performing Artists in the State Sector

A second wave of pressure for reform in the marketing of cultural products has come from performing artists employed by the central, provincial, municipal and county governments. On 1 January 1983 they received the official blessing of the Minister of Culture, Zhu Muzhi, who publicly endorsed major changes in the mix of state and independent funding for the performing arts, and corresponding reforms in the organisation and levels of autonomy of individual performing groups. On the following day a Deputy-Mayor of Beijing, Bai Jiefu, launched a public campaign promoting the First Troupe of the First Troupe of the Beijing Opera Company as an exemplary model of the reforms in question, whereupon the national dailies began to publicise the innovations and achievements of the model First Team. The Director of the First Team, the noted actress Zhao Yanxia, wrote in a personal account that the reforms severely limited the level of state subsidy and made her unit responsible for its own profits and losses thus making it more sensitive to box-office returns and more responsive to audience demands — in short, that they gave her troupe an unashamedly commercial orientation. Other reports were quick to list the advantages of the reforms, noting that in the first place they offer financial benefits to the state, to collectives and to individuals; secondly, they boost the rate of performances, so offering young actors far greater public exposure and the public a wider choice of fare; thirdly, they encourage troupes to travel more widely and so facilitate the exchange of artistic ideas; and fourthly, they foster a keener sense of unity and purpose within the performing groups themselves. Each of these purported advantages of the reforms amounts to a tacit acknowledgement of the faults of the state performing system in its unreformed state — that it is costly, unproductive, urban-centred and faction-ridden. These four problems had already surfaced among performing-arts groups in the provinces and been addressed at that level long before the central authorities launched their campaign to emulate the First Team of the Beijing Opera Company. Away from Beijing, the early initiative for structural reform appears to have come from performers themselves, who have found that their own levels of activity, enthusiasm and income fall in comparison with those of peasants and workers of neighbouring communities who are earning extra sums under various material incentives schemes.
The commercialisation of local state performing groups has been consciously modelled on the contract systems of the APRS. Inspired by local peasants working under the APRS, the Baoji (Shaanxi) Municipal Drama Troupe introduced its own contract system in March 1982. A contract was drawn up between the troupe and one of its subordinate units empowering the unit to keep for its own use a fixed portion (30 per cent) of takings over and above the usual amount of box-office receipts (4000 yuan) from a standard number of performances (25) on a regular rural tour of one month. The cohesion and efficiency of the group increased markedly under the contract system, and in the space of thirty-five days the unit expanded its repertoire, visited ten rural counties, staged eighty-two performances and grossed an unprecedented 14720 yuan. Trouble struck when the moment came to apportion the surplus income among the performers, for the local finance bureau ruled the use of responsibility systems by cultural units to be invalid, and allowed only partial distribution of bonuses to members of the unit concerned. The Baoji Municipal Troupe then reverted to its earlier state of torpor, and a subsequent tour of rural Sichuan by another unit recorded the low standard rates of performance and receipts and returned home without even covering its costs. Meanwhile in Shenyang a couple of members of a state musical troupe, the performance rate of which had slipped to almost nil outside of the festive season, took their lead from the APRS and launched out on their own early in 1981. Over the two years leading up to the official endorsement of structural reforms within state troupes by the Ministry of Culture, the breakaway troupe travelled over five thousand kilometres and staged almost one thousand performances in forty-nine communes and brigades before a peasant audience in excess of half a million. In the case of the Shenyang performers, they were able to keep a reasonable portion of box-office receipts after expenses and a state ‘management fee’ had been subtracted. While the pull for structural reform has come from models of responsibility systems outside of the performing arts, the push for reform stems from problems within the state cultural sector itself. Pressure for structural reform, from performers and state officials alike, has mounted to crisis point largely by dint of financial difficulties currently besetting the performing arts. There is little scope for expanding personal incomes under the orthodox system of subsidies for state troupes unless the state substantially increases its level of funding. Rather than increase their outlays on cultural expenses the central and provincial governments have, over the past few years, been keen to keep cultural expenditure within the limits prescribed by the overall programme of economic consolidation. By my own reckoning, the various governments have provided roughly 1700 million yuan in direct subsidies to state arts groups over the last decade. This rate of expenditure is now said to represent a substantial loss to the state, and a
loss which can no longer be borne in light of other pressing demands on state expenditure.\textsuperscript{28} Beijing has thus grown impatient with incessant demands for state funding of the performing arts, as indicated by the Minister of Culture when he referred to the limited nature of state funds available for the performing arts and by the Deputy-Mayor of Beijing in calling for reform of those cultural groups which draw too heavily on state finances.\textsuperscript{29} Under these circumstances, the most pressing question facing performing artists on the state payroll is not how they might ‘grow rich’ but rather how they can maintain job security and present levels of income.

A second major source of funding which seems to have contracted along with state subsidies has been that of work units which, in the past at least, provided indirect subsidies through the box-office by buying blocks of tickets for distribution to their employees at the request of Party propaganda departments. Judging from veiled complaints about the system of institutional ticket purchases, it would appear that it is no longer as widespread as in the past.\textsuperscript{30} One feature of this system is that some state performing troupes have come to owe their allegiance primarily to their local propaganda department representatives and only secondarily to their audiences, with the result that they stage performances so heavily laden with explicit political content that few people will pay out of their own pockets to attend. Troupes which offer this type of fare have come to rely on institutional ticket purchases for their survival, which is threatened by any decline in such purchases.

A third source of financial difficulty, which has only recently emerged from the shadow of the other two, arises from the fact that certain genres within the performing arts have fallen out of popular favour. The revival of traditional opera and modern spoken drama which took place after the hiatus of the Cultural Revolution has proven very short-lived, as neither of these two forms has been able to capture the imagination of the new generation.\textsuperscript{31} The decline in popularity of opera and drama has variously been attributed to a corresponding rise in the popularity of film, television and recorded music, or alternatively to the ossification of the two forms under an atmosphere of complacency generated by the ‘big pot’ system of state subsidies. Performers who are committed to the survival of their particular genres quite naturally prefer the second of these two explanations and accordingly look to market-oriented structural reforms as a way of salvaging them from oblivion.\textsuperscript{32} Hence many state performing troupes, confronted by new limitations on direct and indirect subsidies and in many cases by a decline in the popularity of their genres, are currently faced with the alternative of reforming their outlook and organisation to cater to box-office demands, or going under.

The experience of various performing troupes around the country highlights the struggle for survival which underlies the enthusiasm of many state
performers for greater commercialisation of their profession. The famous Municipal Yangzhou Opera Troupe ground to a halt in May 1981 after payments of salaries and expenses for the first five months of the year had consumed the state subsidy for the entire year. The management of the troupe had earlier introduced a system of fairly uniform bonuses and awards in a futile attempt to raise the number and the quality of performances, so that closure might be forestalled by an increase in receipts from the box-office. After this attempt had failed, the bankrupt troupe drew up a radical administrative reform programme to enable it to carry on. Under the conditions of the reform programme, subsidiary units within the troupe were given far greater responsibility for estimating and auditing their own accounts, and were entitled to enter into contracts with the troupe specifying how much they should return to the troupe and what proportion of the surplus they could keep for their own use. The division of the surplus was left at the discretion of the basic units, which were entitled to decide who should be rewarded, and who should in effect be punished, on the basis of work performance. This system did produce results. The number, quality and variety of performances increased substantially and the corresponding rise in box-office receipts enabled the troupe not only to meet expenses and salaries but also to award each member an additional sum averaging 60 yuan per month. At a more humble level, a state acrobatics troupe attached to Qingyun County in Shandong Province was forced to disband after its annual state subsidy had been consumed in the first six months of 1981. Towards the end of the year the troupe was resurrected in another form by disgruntled members who pooled their own capital, gathered twenty other performers and instituted an economic responsibility system whereby members were individually contracted to perform certain tasks in return for a share of profits which would vary according to skill and effort. In 1982, the reformed troupe’s first full year of operation, the income of particular members varied quite widely but averaged around 1200 yuan. In these cases the motives underlying the commercial restructuring of state troupes were to save jobs and, in the case of the Yangzhou troupe, to rescue an historic art form from pending doom. The fact that performers came to make more money under the new scheme than they had under the old was quite incidental, and less a sign of artists ‘seeking personal gains’ than an indication of the shortcomings of the ‘big pot’ system of state funding in the face of new circumstances.

Contradictions and Conflicts

The unreformed state and collective cultural networks, characterised by assured government funding and egalitarian salary rates, have had their share of problems, some of which have been touched upon already. One contradiction has appeared between the high operating costs of the networks
and their low rate of return in terms of the volume and quality of productions. The state system, moreover, has become increasingly expensive to maintain at a time when governments in China have been trying to restrain their spending. Another contradiction lies in the concentration of state and collective facilities in cities, towns and commune centres beyond the convenient reach of the bulk of the population, and in the networks' inability to exhort or motivate urban performers to take their productions deep into the countryside. A further and related contradiction lies in the decline of some art forms in the cities, and in the mounting debts arising from this decline, at a time when rural communities are crying out for professional entertainment in any form, and are in a position to pay well for it. Yet another contradiction is to be found in the tension between what performers are prepared to give their audiences, under the watchful eyes of their benefactors in the Party and government, and what these audiences are prepared to pay to see. A final set of contradictions revolves around relations within performing troupes themselves, between those who owe their positions to skills and those who owe them to connections; between well-known older performers who hog the spotlight and unknown younger performers who are gaining little public exposure; between inflated staff numbers and falling workloads, and so on. Each of these problems has recently been exacerbated by a resurgence of the ethic of individual achievement which has accompanied the spread of responsibility and incentive systems in agriculture and industry. Private initiatives and contractual systems in the marketing of culture have arisen in response to these numerous contradictions, but have in turn given rise to a whole new range of problems. The choice currently facing the Chinese leadership is which set of contradictions it would prefer to live with.

The recent structural reforms are notable for simultaneously reducing the burden on the state while significantly expanding the volume, variety and reach of cultural services. Along with greater volume and variety, however, has come vulgarity. With the market-place now calling the tune, form and content have adapted to popular demand and in so doing have given romance, adventure, superstition, violence and sex the prominence once reserved for politics and public morality. Exponents of the 'comic dialogue' (xiangsheng), a form well suited to double-entendre, have enhanced the popularity of the genre by appealing to 'poor taste'. Similarly, the great majority of musical performers at work in the countryside are reportedly performing vulgar works indiscriminately, while a minority are said to be actively promoting superstition and debauchery. Some rural audiences, having grown accustomed to such fare, have become sufficiently emboldened to howl down performers who insist on staging wholesome productions. Some blame for these developments may be, and indeed has been, sheeted home to Western influences at work in China, which is most apparent in this
respect in the circulation of pornographic books, pictures and tapes in Guangdong Province. But the spread of vulgar material is neither confined geographically to Guangdong nor restricted artistically to modern forms of mass communication: one unconfirmed report tells of an itinerant troupe presenting naked female performers in Yan'an, the remote citadel of the Communist revolution. The emphasis on violence and sex in China's 'feudal' popular culture bears comparison with that of any other country, and given half the chance would provide a solid foundation for the growth of a crass popular culture which is quite indigenous.

A second problem area associated with structural reform falls within artistic circles themselves, and covers a range of new disputes between different artistic genres and within particular performing troupes. Among state units, spokespersons for the theatrical arts appear on the whole to support a greater market orientation, while those representing the musical arts appear satisfied with the status quo and stand opposed to reform. This difference of opinion has prompted the Minister of Culture, in an address to the Musicians Association in March 1983, to qualify his earlier remarks supporting wholesale restructuring with the condition that reforms should be adapted to the requirements of different genres. Even within theatrical groups, not everyone is pleased with the turn of events, for the resolution of one internal problem almost invariably creates another. The reforms have, for example, helped to overcome the difficulties formerly faced by young performers in gaining public exposure, and in addition have created new positions for unemployed youth. At the same time, however, they have managed to displace older and less talented performers who either cannot keep up the pace or find that there is little public demand for their services as performers. Similarly, in a situation where big names draw the crowds, some lesser known performers resent the fact that they cannot compete successfully on the open market. Yet another cause of friction is the disadvantaged position in which dramatists, choreographers, designers and auxiliary staff find themselves when their performing colleagues sign lucrative contracts, leaving them out in the cold. The problems facing dramatists have gained special prominence through lobbying by the Dramatists Association. Dramatists formerly on the state payroll are liable to lose their positions when theatrical companies adopt contract systems, for the contracting sub-units find it cheaper and more satisfactory to choose from among the wide variety of scripts circulating on the open market. Complaints from dramatists are not necessarily converted into hostility to commercial restructuring as such. Just as problems which were encountered in the early stages of agricultural responsibility systems were overcome by extending rather than limiting the scope of contracts, so members of the Shaanxi chapter of the Dramatists Association have proposed expanding the range of responsibility systems to include themselves, allowing them to share in the anticipated bonanza as well.
The most important arena of conflict over the commercialisation of culture is to be found, as is invariably the case, at the very top of the Chinese political hierarchy. Even allowing that much of the impetus for peasant household initiatives and for restructuring of the state sector has come from within each of these groups, progress would have been rather limited had not peasant entrepreneurs and performers in the state sector received the passive and at times active support of government and Party authorities at many levels. The location and extent of this support is difficult to gauge with any precision, but the significance of the question calls for some preliminary remarks.

Among those who have lent their public support to the recent initiatives may be counted the Minister of Culture and his municipal equivalents in Beijing and Shanghai, and one Deputy-Mayor of Beijing, who appear to have the support of the CPC Central Committee in the form of its Central Document Number One (1983). Critical comments have been aired by Premier Zhao Ziyang, representatives of the State Council, National People's Congress and the People's Liberation Army (PLA), and most pointedly from the Head of the CPC Central Propaganda Department, Deng Liqun. In the case of the Ministry of Culture, the PLA and the Central Propaganda Department, the respective positions adopted on the issue are clearly related to their distinct areas of interest. The Ministry of Culture is concerned with expanding cultural services, particularly in rural areas, while containing overall expenditure. The PLA on the other hand has an extensive cultural network which for practical reasons cannot be converted to contract systems, and hence its cultural workers stand to lose out against their civilian counterparts should the reforms proceed. The Central Propaganda Department has reason to object to the reforms on the grounds that it will lose political leverage over cultural units if they no longer depend on subsidies for their existence, and that the works emanating from commercialised units are at times falling well outside the pale of its much proclaimed 'socialist spiritual civilisation'. Ideological considerations aside, the choice of which set of contradictions, the old or the new, sits most easily with the highest authorities may depend in the last analysis on which of these institutions holds sway.

It is one thing to condemn commerce in culture, but quite another to wipe it out. The new range of constraints and opportunities which have helped cultural commercialisation on its way also makes the task of eradicating it much more difficult. Current criticism of the phenomenon is taking place under circumstances which encourage private initiative, reward individual achievement and concede a role for market forces in a socialist economy. The demand for cultural services in rural areas far outweighs the supply, thus providing an inducement to private cultural entrepreneurs. Critics of cultural commercialism, conscious of the contradiction
between their position on this issue and currently accepted wisdom on the importance of the market-place in the Chinese rural economy, have put forward the claim that although cultural products are 'circulated in the form of commodities, they are different from ordinary commodities . . . The decadent concept of "everything for money" should not be allowed to infiltrate our literature and art'.50 This is a fine distinction, perhaps too fine for a community trained to see central policy in holistic terms and accustomed to considering cultural policy in particular as a barometer forecasting changes in the general political climate. As the marketing of cultural services has been consciously modelled on precedents in agriculture and industry, it will not be possible to outlaw the one without dampening public confidence in the other. Even if the problem of public confidence is ignored, other practical difficulties remain. Cultural commercialisation has come about not through administrative fiat but through widespread discontent with the shortcomings of state and collective cultural services, and will on this account be difficult to eliminate by mere proscription. Unequivocal prohibitions may prevent state troupes from practising contract responsibility systems, at the expense of resurrecting and aggravating the problems which led to their introduction, but unless this prohibition is accompanied by a substantial increase in the level of government subsidies then it will deprive many artists of a living and indirectly drive them from the state to the private cultural sector. The private cultural sector, and especially that part of it which has gained a strong footing in remote rural areas, presents greater difficulties for those determined to stamp it out. There are problems of definition in determining what constitutes cultural activity as distinct from other forms of community service provided by legitimate specialised households, and in determining whether full-time, part-time, privately funded, contracted and private non-professional cultural workers should all be tarred with the one brush. In addition there are structural problems presented by the weakening of the collective infrastructure in precisely those areas where private household activities have taken the strongest hold, and by the poor leadership and morale of the Party in many places at the grassroots level. In the light of these various problems, it appears that the eradication of cultural commercialism requires more than just another rectification campaign. In the absence of some wider solution, the Central Propaganda Department may have to accept this commercialism as an unfortunate by-product of other Party and government policies, and learn to be content with policing it rather than trying to wipe it out.

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NOTES

1 One notable exception is Richard Kraus' stimulating argument for greater recognition of the role of the market-place in historical assessments of cultural policy in the PRC: 'China’s Cultural “Liberalization” and Conflict over the Social Organization of the Arts', Modern China, 9:2 (April 1983), pp.212-227.


4 As in the case of the Jing bao analyst, idem.


14 Xinhua she, 26 Sep. 1983, in FE/W1256/a/2-3.


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21 RMRB, 1 Jan. 1983, p.4.
24 It should also be noted that the First Team launched its own reform programme sixteen months before its public presentation in Jan. 1983 as a model for general emulation: idem.
27 This tentative estimate is derived from the information that the state subsidy for troupes in Jiangsu totalled 70.5 million yuan over the nine years 1973-81, and that in 1981 the number of state troupes in Jiangsu (161) comprised about 4.5 per cent of the national total (3483). It assumes that subsidy levels are on the whole proportional to troupe numbers, and that state troupe numbers were fairly constant over the decade, two assumptions which cannot be taken as proven. Jiangsu xiju [Jiangsu Theatre], 1983:6 (June 1983), pp.12-13; Zhongguo tongji nianjian [China Statistics Yearbook], 1981 (Overseas Edition), Hong Kong; Jingji daobao [Economics Bulletin], Hong Kong, 1982, p.459.
32 Shanghai xiju, idem.
35 HQ, 1982:21 (1 Nov. 1982), p.34.
40 The source of this difference is unclear to me, but may lie in a higher level of prosperity among musicians under the orthodox system of state funding. Musicians do not seem to have been suffering the same decline in popularity, and hence loss of supplementary income from the box-office, experienced by some theatrical troupes which have then been forced to consume their annual state subsidies before year’s end. Quyi, 1983:4 (April 1983), pp.2-3.
The Minister of Culture broached the problem of redundant personnel in the article launching the reforms: *RMRB*, 1 Jan. 1983, p.4.


Deng Liqun currently has a far higher profile than the Minister of Culture. He recently gained appointment to the Central Guiding Committee for CPC Party Rectification Work, and appears to be gearing the Propaganda Bureau to attack commercialisation in cultural circles under the aegis of this rectification movement. *RMRB*, 13 Oct. 1983, p.1; *BR*, idem.