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Respected Ministers, Dear Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I'm very delighted to attend this Asia Cultural Co-operation Forum upon the invitation of the Home Affairs Bureau of Hong Kong SAR. The Asia Cultural Co-operation Forum has been held successfully for five times and this is the sixth time for this very conducive platform of cultural cooperation and discussions to be held among all Asian countries and regions. I hereby would like to thank Mr. TSANG Tak-sing, JP and the Hong Kong SAR government for your efforts in putting together this forum, give my respect to the HKSAR Government for their contribution to the development and cooperation of Asian cultures, and extend my warm welcome to all the ministers and friends participating in this event.

Asia is a beautiful and loving continent where the diligent and intelligent Asian peoples have created splendid cultures and arts as significant ingredients of world civilisations. The Asian peoples are natural lovers of culture and life, and the colours and glamour of culture are not only decorations but also the integral essence of our lives. We need culture as an indispensable part of our life and we need art as the fabrics of culture. Therefore it has become an important and inescapable task for all nations to guarantee the basic cultural rights of our people, to benefit them with the rich fruits of culture and arts, to improve the quality of life of the people, to enhance their sense of happiness, to safeguard social stability and development and to foster the cultural and social prosperity and progress of not only our own nations but all humanity. The theme of this ministerial conference "Living in Arts and Arts in Living" therefore provides a very good platform for us to exchange views and ideas.

China is a member of the Asia family. Thanks to our ancestors and people's hard work for thousands of years, we have now been blessed with a culture of great richness, diversity, width and depth. In the last decades, with the reform and opening-up and the robust development of all sectors in China, our culture has been given high regard as one of the four pillars of national development in parallel with political, economic and social sectors. With the conviction that culture and arts must grow from the people and serve the people to ensure long-standing prosperity, and following Mr. Deng Xiaoping's proclamation "Our culture and arts belong to the people", our government has made it clear that we shall speed up the construction and improvement of a nationwide public cultural service network, consistently improve the quality of public

cultural service, guarantee the basic cultural rights and interests of the people, so that the widest Chinese public can enjoy good health, build good character, increase wisdom and knowledge and cultivate good virtues, in the wish that the whole nation enjoy higher levels of culture and create a social life of great harmony and vitality.

Given the opportunity of this forum, I would like to share with you some practices of our country in building the national public cultural service network and safeguarding the basic cultural rights and interests of our people.

First, the fundamental principles of publicly beneficial cultural undertakings have been set as the following: they should be for the public good, ensure the most basic cultural rights of the people and seek balanced and convenient availability of their services. Non-profit public cultural institutions should play the main role in facilitating these services under the guidance and leadership of the government, relying mostly on public finance and encouraging social contributions. And priority should be given to the grassroots population and to the innovation of service methods.

Second, cultural infrastructure construction has been greatly strengthened on all levels. With the growth of public budget in China, there has been a steady increase of input for cultural infrastructure construction. A great number of key cultural projects have been built and put to use in recent years, including the National Centre for the Performing Arts, the Second Phase of the National Library of China and Digital Library, the National Peking Opera Mei Lanfang Great Theatre and Tianqiao Theatre, and the National Museum of China is also undergoing expansion. Meanwhile, some other projects like the expanded National Art Museum, the Museum of Intangible Cultural Heritage and the Museum of Crafts and Fine Arts are also underway, and a lot of provinces and municipalities have built iconic cultural infrastructure in their central areas. We have reached the objective of equipping every county with at least one library and one cultural centre, and establishing 26,700 township level cultural stations either through new construction or expansion. Up to 2008, we have had a nationwide public cultural service network covering both urban and rural areas, with 2,819 public libraries, 3,217 cultural centres, 37,938 cultural stations and 247,332 cultural rooms (village or community level), thus providing fundamental guarantee for the safeguarding of basic cultural rights and interests of our citizens.

Third, steadily enhance the capacities of public cultural institutions for better services. One of the most important initiatives towards this goal is the free admission policy for public cultural venues. By the end of 2008, altogether 1,007 museums and memorial

sites have offered free admission to the public, attracting 154 million visitors. Apart from that, many local cultural institutions have focused on reforming their cultural centres, libraries and cultural stations, improving on both the methods and effects of their services to cater for the needs of rural areas and grassroots population. For example, using mobile cultural facilities such as travelling stage trucks, travelling libraries and travelling cinemas to provide flexible and outdoor services as a complement to in-house services, extending the outreach of public cultural service to the communities and countryside.

Fourth, enrich public cultural resources. We have launched the National Cultural Resources Information Sharing Project (CRISP), which uses the latest achievements of science and technology to digitise and integrate the best cultural information resources of China and spread them nationwide through an extensive network of outlets, including Internet, satellite, radio and TV network. Since the inception of this project in 2002, a total of 750,000 service outlets of different levels have been established, providing altogether 74.7 TB (1TB=250,000 digital books or 926 hours of video programs) of digital content to the public. There is also a project named Sending Books to the Countryside Project (SBC), which is jointly initiated by the Ministry of Culture and the Ministry of Finance to solve the problem of book shortage on the grassroots level, whereby much demanded books will be purchased by the earmarked funding of central budget and sent to 592 national key poverty-ridden counties and townships. The Farmers' Library project was launched by the State Administration of Press and Publications to benefit the farming population, which resulted in the building of 93,000 libraries in the rural areas. And the Travelling Stage Truck Project (TST) and Rural Film Screening Project have provided 1000 travelling stage trucks for local theatres and performing groups from 2007 to 2010, greatly enhancing the service capacity of these local institutions. The Rural Film Screening Project, initiated by the State Administration of Radio, Film and Television, in the meantime, provides 3 million film screenings to the farmers every year.

Fifth, community culture is greatly enriched and thriving. In both urban and rural areas, public cultural entertainments such as choruses and dance parties are increasingly vibrant due to the constant progress of society. Public squares, communities, enterprises, campuses and army camps have become meeting points of dynamic cultural events. At the same time, cultural authorities of all levels have made full use of the rich resources of intangible cultural heritage of all localities to launch exemplary cultural programmes, injecting new impetus and richness to public community cultures. The motto that "culture is created by the people" is fully

implemented.

Sixth, focusing on special target groups for cultural service, supporting ethnic minority cultures. China's social demographics have changed profoundly in the last few years, making it ever more imperative to focus on such target groups as the seniors, minors, the disabled and migrant workers. Cultural departments of different levels have taken this into account and designed many widely-acclaimed cultural programs. In 1999, the Ministry of Culture initiated an annual national senior's chorus festival named "Eternal Splendour" and since 2005, the Ministry of Culture collaborated with 6 departments including the Ministry of Finance to launch the "Chinese Children's Songs Creation and Promotion Plan", which gave birth to a long-term mechanism encouraging the creation of more and more good songs for the children, thus helping to foster a conducive social environment for the minors to grow healthily. The cultural rights and interests of the disabled people have also been given high attention, particularly in the cultural and sports field where their creativity is highly publicised.

Bearing in mind the current situation and special needs of ethnic minority cultures, the Ministry of Culture has formulated four preferential policies for ethnic minority communities regarding the construction of cultural infrastructures, training of cultural and artistic talents, cultural exchange with foreign countries and protection of cultural heritage. We have also taken many substantial and practical measures to cater for the different needs of different regions, prioritising on ethnic cultural affairs, giving major support to key projects and counting on one-on-one relief systems. As a result, input for ethnic minority cultural development is largely increased and greater support is given to this field.

In conclusion, China's public cultural undertakings have witnessed notable achievements in the last few years. However, in view of the increasingly diversified cultural demands of the people, and the opportunities and challenges posed by globalisation and modern science and technology, China's cultural development still has a long way to go and a lot of challenges ahead. We still need to overcome quite a lot of difficulties and tackle many problems through strenuous efforts and great innovation.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Culture is the soul of a nation. The Chinese people are great lovers of culture and life.

As 2008 marked the 30th anniversary of China's reform and opening-up, 2009 marks the 60th anniversary of the founding of the People's Republic of China. In the last 60 years, the Chinese people have never stopped striving forward both in the creation of material wealth and the inheritance and renewal of cultural traditions. China is now committed to becoming a modernised country of prosperity both in economy and culture, a country that will make greater contributions to the peace and development of the whole world. The Chinese government always attaches great importance to the cultural exchange and cooperation with all other Asian countries, upholding the noble mission of global cultural diversity and calling for strengthened cultural exchange and mutual learning between China and all Asian countries based on the principles of mutual respect and absolute equality, so that we could strive for common prosperity together. We sincerely wish to join our hands with all Asian countries towards our common goal, that is, to benefit all Asian peoples with rich cultures, to ensure the consistent inheritance, innovation and development of all the best of Asian cultures, to safeguard the peace and stability of Asia through the unique charm of culture, to promote the overall development and progress of Asia, to carve out a bright tomorrow for Asian civilisations and embrace a most splendid future for all human civilisations.

I wish the Forum a great success! Thank you!