**Chinese or Western, it's a time to relax**

1 It's that time of the year when the world seems to be caught in a trance – the trance of end-of-year celebrations. End-of-year, I said.

2 The problem seems to be exactly that. Why should we in China refer to the week between December 24 and 31 as the end of the year when ours (according to the lunar calendar ) is at least a month away?

3 We do so apparently because Christmas and New Year have become global festivals, not because they (especially Christmas) are essentially Western in nature and spirit, but because we can relax during those few days.

4 Nevertheless, some scholars and students have expressed concern over the increasing influence of Christmas on oriental, particularly Chinese, culture. Their fears may be justified to a certain extent. In fact, we Chinese do seem to attach a lot more time and attention to Christmas today than we did even a couple of decades ago.

5 For good or bad, the world has possibly undergone more changes in the past two decades than it did in the past two centuries. We have used more resources, burnt more fuel, caused more pollution and killed off more animals and plants as we have come closer to each other to form a truly global village. Television, we thought, was the last uniting factor till we got a feel for the Internet.

6 All these changes have made us take a different look at the world beyond and our home within. Nothing comes without a rider in this global market. If we want to be part of the dazzle and comfort that the West is known for, we had better accept some of its anomalies, too. This is not to say that festivals mean something else to the West.

7 Be it on the mainland or in the highly developed West or in the poorest of societies, a festival carries the same meaning. People across the world celebrate them with their family and friends. The basic concept is the same too, sharing a feast or a humble meal (with a few drinks in some societies like ours and the West).

8 We celebrate an occasion to vent our feelings, to relax and enjoy a break from the everyday skulduggery that life in these times has become. It's apparently no different from the break our ancestors enjoyed from the mundane affairs of their daily lives.

9 Most of the world follows the Gregorian calendar , including us, in their day-to-day lives. So the festivals and special events in that calendar are bound to influence us. That we, like many South, Southeast Asian, Middle East and perhaps some indigenous American people, follow the lunar calendar for our festivals is a different matter altogether.

10 We cannot afford to be left untouched by the festive spirit of the West, which doesn't mean we follow the West blindly. Not everything about their culture may be good, but decadence is not the sole preserve of the West. No culture in the world is free of decadence and that includes Chinese culture.

11 So the problem is not Western culture, or what we generally associate with it. The problem is those who are blinded by everything Western. We have to find out why more and more Chinese, especially the youngsters, feel at one with Western festivals as much as they do with the Chinese ones. But thankfully our festivals have lost none of their charm. And here is where the alarm bells sounded by scholars and students come in.

12 I can understand the zeal of these people. They want to conserve our culture, and that definitely doesn't make them what we generally refer to as "conservatives". They have a point. But they, or for that matter anybody else, cannot save any society from the influence of a world getting smaller by the day.

13 So instead of trying to shut our eyes and ears to Western festivals, we should accept the goodness they offer and practise what they stand for. And let's not forget that Jesus was not born in the West but the East (the Middle East, to be precise), and he preached love for mankind and help for the poor.