

## **Culture without Freedom – The Reality in the PR China as a Result of Primacy of Politics**

A Commentary on the Year of Chinese Culture 2012 in Germany by Tsewang Norbu

The Year of Chinese Culture 2012 is opened by China Philharmonic Orchestra with a mixed concert on January 30 in Konzerthaus in Berlin and will end in December. With this "Cultural Year" on such a grand scale in different parts of Germany the PR China is celebrating the 40th Anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Germany and China. The Federal Government welcomes this as a positive response to "Germany and China" which the German Government organized with great success from 2007 to 2010 in China. According to the Foreign Office the federal government is "neither organizationally nor financially involved" in the implementation of the Year of Chinese Culture 2012.

Judging from the draft program that is publicly available the apprehension is justified that the PR China will use this major event for propaganda purposes as it often did in the past. Officially the PR China is a multi-ethnic state with 55 so-called national minorities, of which the Uyghurs, Mongols and Tibetans markedly stand out racially, culturally and historically. Fortunately the culture of these three occupied and subjugated peoples does not appear in the program at all, as the experience from similar major events in the past shows that the representatives of these peoples will not be free from the tutelage of the Communist Party to present their own authentic culture. Nevertheless, it is interesting to note, despite her claim of sovereignty over East Turkestan, Mongolia and Tibet, the PR of China always treats these three states as foreign country, e.g. tourists need in addition to Chinese visa a special permit for East Turkestan or Tibet, if they want to go to these countries. It is high time that the international community and international law also take note of such facts.

Also the representatives of opposition Chinese culture inside and outside are left completely out of this major cultural event, despite making of high claims to provide space for "dialogue and exchange". A Year of Culture that excludes all forms of non-official culture clearly demonstrates the totalitarian character of the initiators of such events and blatantly contradicts the freedom of culture

Ironically, the prelude to the cultural dialogue program for the Year of Chinese Culture in Germany is opened with Helmut Schmidt in Berliner Kommandantenhaus which is jointly organized by the Bertelsmann, Bosch and Koerber Foundation. The Ex-Federal-Chancellor is one of those weighty admirers of the Chinese economic miracle of the last 3 decades and is unfortunately also the most prominent representative of cultural relativism when it comes to criticism of China. He, therefore, acts as an apologist for the totalitarian rule of the Chinese communist regime and not as an advocate of the forbidden artists or oppressed peoples. Even in times of economic miracle the repression is increasing rather than decreasing. The Chinese artists and dissidents as well as the Uyghurs, Mongols and Tibetans are increasingly facing it since years. To provide such a platform to him in the prelude of cultural dialogue program makes it all the more absurd.

The draft program is stuffed with hollow words like "dialogue" and "exchange" without any discernible space for dialogue and exchange. A Year of Culture, which leaves no room for dissidents, has no right of claim to the noble word of "culture". In the ears of all those advocates of several thousand years of authentic Chinese culture it is bound to sound like a mockery.

The draft program cites the result of a survey by a U.S. research institute in July 2011 that says "In no other European country do people perceive China as negative as in Germany". The Year of Culture is of course aimed to correct this, but with the scheduled program, it should barely succeed. It is, however, illusory to hope that the Chinese leaders will show hindsight and provide this time sufficient room to critics in the official Chinese program. Therefore, it all depends upon those federal states, communities, festivals and other institutions participating in the Year of Chinese Culture either as partner or even organize their own programs, whether at the end of the year China manages to correct her negative image in Germany or not. But the prelude on January 31 with Helmut Schmidt has, unfortunately, clearly missed the opportunity.

The reputation of China is not the business of the Uyghurs, Mongols or Tibetans. Nevertheless, it is to be hoped that in this Year of Chinese Culture no China-bashing will take place, not out of love for this inhuman regime, but out of concern about the internal democratization of China. Should it come to China-bashing again, the regime will again mobilize politically immature and docile Chinese masses against the West, against the free press, and of course against the "ungrateful minorities" of Uyghurs, Mongols and Tibetans. This will throw the democratic endeavors in China back for years again.

Therefore the federal states, municipalities, foundations and festivals that are participating in the Year of Chinese Culture and claim aloud to offer forums for "dialogue" and "exchange" should offer not mere lip services but give substantial room for critics in their programs. We cannot afford to let "Frankfurt Book Fair" repeat again (when 2009 China as Guest of Honor tried to silence all forms of criticism) or "Enlightenment" (when Beijing tried to influence the German exhibition 2011 in China by refusing visa to certain independent speakers). Otherwise the German side would have done once again great service to the regime in Beijing and inflicted heavy damage to the tender shoots of civil society in China.

Tibetans and their supporters such as the Tibet Initiative Deutschland and **International Campaign for Tibet or World Ugyhur Congress** as well as human rights organizations like the Society for Threatened Peoples und amnesty international will take this major event as an opportunity to highlight the deteriorating situation in China in the field of human and civil rights, freedom of speech and religion like the four week long exhibition on January 29 in Hamburg by the Regional Chapters of Association of Tibetans in Germany and Tibet Initiative Deutschland or the joint vigil of all the five organizations on January 30 in Berlin.

The Chinese opposition in the West is going to challenge Beijing on the question of right to interpret Chinese culture by organizing spectacular and authentic Chinese Cultural performances in Berlin and Frankfurt with the Shen Yun Performing Arts that was founded 2006 in New York.

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