

Chinese Theme Park Incited Anger Instead of Amusement
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Florida Splendid China, the Chinese government-owned and operated propaganda theme park near Orlando, closed its gates on the last day of 2003. The media repeated the theme-park line about decreasing attendance and the overall decline in tourism, but these statements were broad generalizations. Left unsaid was that the theme park had become a liability to the Chinese government. In the competition for public opinion (or perhaps more succinctly, the propaganda war), Splendid China's message would have continued with the cash hemorrhage. What became intolerable was that the park had assumed the additional roles of lightning rod for public criticism and rallying point for the opposition.

Contrary to the accusations in the press that the protesters probably did not even know where Tibet was, monks who once escaped from Tibet attended demonstrations. Monks who had once lived in the Potala Palace, the subject of the Tibetan people's indignation, attended the first day to add truth to the debate. No less than Professor Jigme Norbu, Takster Rinpoche the brother to his holiness the Dalai Lama even visited Florida to decry the Chinese government propaganda that describes Tibet as part of China.

The significance of Splendid China as an outlet for Chinese government propaganda was not lost on the Taiwanese people. The version of the park in China does have Taiwan exhibits in accordance with the Chinese government edict that Taiwan is part of China. According to the deposed American partner, the Chinese owners wanted exhibits to represent Taiwan, but pressure from local Taiwanese persuaded the owners not to build the exhibits.

Offended by the inclusion of an exhibit titled "The Mausoleum of Genghis Khan," Mongols have objected to the statement that Genghis Khan was Chinese. Also of concern is that the structure passed off as his mausoleum is nothing more than a way to control, not enhance, the great Khan's legacy. His descendants visited and expressed their sentiments.

Offended by the implication that their homeland is Chinese, Uyghurs from East Turkistan also visited and objected to the Id Gah Mosque and Tomb of Appak Hoja replicas. Uyghur people built the originals, even though the Chinese government gives a Chinese name to Appak Hoja's family tomb. From a land where sending newspapers overseas will put a grandmother in jail for endangering state security, the Uyghurs with whom I became acquainted have never advocated violence. On the contrary, violence visits them for a difference of opinion.

Citizens Against Communist Chinese Propaganda (CACCP) is an all-volunteer organization committed to the legal and nonviolent opposition to five of the 60-plus exhibits. Using the united volunteer efforts of individuals and organizations against the Chinese government-funded propaganda machine provides a sweet victory to those who have supported this cause. Those efforts were the ultimate nail in the coffin that closed Florida Splendid China.

From the beginning, CACCP wrote letters seeking negotiations with the management, but park managers ignored all correspondence. In response, the actions started. As the coordinator of CACCP, I sought to fulfill my duty to ensure that Chinese government propaganda would not get a free ride in the United

States. As an American, I felt it necessary to confront the propaganda and create an umbrella organization for like-minded people to come forward and voice their opposition. CACCP's story might have been just the statistics: 50 demonstrations, videotaped statements in front of the contested exhibits, the Website (www.caccp.org), letter-writing campaigns and an eventual need to mention the controversy in media stories on the park. The unseen and uncovered story was the organization of people from a broad range of backgrounds in opposition to the theme park's agenda.

Discounting the supposed downturn in tourism that during the same period produced record gate attendance at other Orlando attractions, the remaining excuse of low attendance figures can be attributed in part to the efforts of CACCP. Though the sad condition and bad marketing of the park can be cited as excuses, the fact is, many people knew about the park from CACCP's efforts and did not trust the exhibits or the owners. The attendance at Florida Splendid China was consistently low for more than 10 years. Something else became an issue, and in my humble opinion the final straw was the transformation of Splendid China. Once just an element of Chinese government propaganda, it became an organizing tool for the opposition to their ignoble rule.

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